

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 39.

Price, Five Cents.



"DOWN UPON YOUR KNEES!" ROARED JESSE JAMES, AND THE TERRIFIED EXPRESS AGENT OBEYED.

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No. 39.

NEW YORK, February 1, 1902.

Price Five Cents.

The James Boys Driven to the Wall;

OR,

THE THREE LIVES OF WILD DECATUR.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

A REIGN OF TERROR.

"I am the daring devil, Jesse James, the terror of America! Give me elbow room, or blood will flow in rivers."

These startling words rang through the theatre of Casas Grande, on the evening of September 6, 1878, with an effect beyond description.

The speaker was a tall, athletic man, of thirty odd years of age, with a ruddy countenance and a mass of yellow hair falling about his broad shoulders not unlike the mane of a lion.

As he shouted his foolhardy boast, he flourished a pair of six-shooters in the air, and his blood-shot eyes glared upon the amazed spectators like the burning orbs of a hunted wolf.

Before the onlookers had recovered from the shock of his appearance, his gaze turned upon the occupants of the box, the mayor and his beautiful daughter, Juniata, the acknowledged belle of the canton.

At sight of the desperate man the maiden shrank back beside her father, with a low cry of terror upon her lips.

"So you thought I would not dare to follow you hyur!" hissed the murderous wretch.

Then, in a louder tone, he cried, as he pointed one of the deadly weapons toward her:

"Beautiful cat! you scorned me yesterday; now suffer the vengeance of Jesse James!"

Then, as his finger pressed the trigger of the weapon leveled at Juniata Gandara, a sharp voice rang through the crowded room with the single word:

"Liar!"

Mayor Gandara, in speechless horror, put forth his arms, as if empty-handed he could shield his daughter from the bullet of the desperado.

Actors and audience were spell-bound.

Those who were near enough to stay the movement of the blond-haired fiend were unable to stir or even to cry out.

But in that brief moment of terror the figure of a man

in the center of the house suddenly rose above the heads of his companions, and the silver mountings of a brace of firearms flashed in the uncertain glare of the footlights.

A few saw him, and knew he was the speaker of the ominous word of an instant before.

Two reports, one swiftly following the other, rang on the death-like stillness of the scene.

The would-be slayer of Juniata Gandara was seen to reel to and fro, and then fall heavily to the floor, a crimson circle on his forehead showing where the bullet of the unerring marksman had hit him.

His own weapon had not been discharged until after the shot of his foe, consequently his aim had been imperfect, and the life of the girl spared.

But this was not known at the time, for she had fallen into her parent's arms insensible.

Wild excitement followed, the mimicry of the comedians quickly supplanted by the tragedy of real life.

Though no one could have told just why it was done, the slayer of the desperado was surrounded and his life was threatened.

Seeing his peril, he started toward the door, thrusting those aside who disputed his exit from the house.

He was a powerfully-built man, and the blows dealt by his bare fists—he refrained from using his firearms at first—sent the victims sprawling in every direction.

"Stand back, you hell-hounds!" he shrieked, "or the worst will be your own."

Finding that the mob was likely to cut off his escape, he began to send the leaden contents of his six-shooters into whoever came in his pathway.

Other shots were fired, and the reports of firearms mingled with the shouts of men and shrieks of women.

When the single foeman had emptied his weapons, and it seemed he must be overpowered by the mob, his eyes fell upon a tall stool standing near one of the heavy pillars of the building.

Uttering a wild yell, he rushed to the place, to quickly wrench one of the legs from its support, and swinging the ponderous club over his head, he mowed a circle around him as the laborer with the scythe cuts down the tall grass.

Howling like so many demons let loose, the mob fell back, until the terrible fighter had almost reached the door.

By that time a friend had come to his assistance, and, taking the demoralized Mexicans from their rear, the latter quickly enabled him to clear the throng, while a Babel of confusion reigned inside the building.

The newcomer was the equal of the first in size, and his countenance bore a strong resemblance to the other.

In fact they were brothers, and, though distinguished

by an undesirable sort of renown, they were known the world over.

They were Frank and Jesse James!

This being the case, of course the man who had attempted to slay Juniata Gandara could not have been he whom he had claimed to be. Just why he should have made such a needless and foolhardy claim cannot be explained, though it was like the general run of his actions. He was known as Wild Decatur.

"This way, Jesse!" said Frank; "Wingfoot is at the door."

A moment after the brothers stood side by side.

"Here is your repeater," said the last comer, handing the other a serviceable Winchester rifle. "We had better take a skip outside the town if I mistake not."

Without replying, Jesse swung himself into the saddle of the nearer of the two horses standing at the door.

Both were fine-looking animals, for the James boys were too good horsemen not to be well mounted.

Frank James, less agile than his brother, and with a limp in his gait, gained the saddle of his spirited steed, Whirlwind, a moment later.

By this time the Mexican horde had begun to swarm out of the theatre, but as few of them had horses at hand, and those unprepared for a race, the James boys quickly disappeared down the winding street of the dust-brown town.

The evening was pleasant and the air exhilarating, after the hot, dry-as-dust atmosphere of the preceding day, so that the horsemen felt jubilant as they dashed along.

Near the outskirts of the town, Jesse, who had been ahead, suddenly reined up Wingfoot, exclaiming:

"Bah! this seems like schoolboy play, running away like this. I was just having some fun when you came along. I have a mind to go back and finish up the game."

"Nothing would be gained by it," replied the more cautious of the twain. "If they should happen to rouse the cavalry it might be more hot than comfortable for us."

"A fig for the cavalry, though they say the major of the regiment is an American and a regular fighter. I—"

"Hark!" interrupted Frank. "I heard some one speak."

As the two listened, the steady tramp of feet was heard at no great distance away, and then a voice was heard to say:

"Let the lieutenant stand by that tree, and you here. That will give you about equal light. I will count three, and at the word 'fire' you are to turn and blaze away."

"Of course that is understood," broke in another voice. "I am impatient to have the affair over, so don't be all night getting ready."

A third person said something which the James boys did not catch, and, curious to see what was going on, they rode nearer, the long grass muffling the steps of their horses so they did not arouse the preoccupied group they discovered in the center of a clearing, where the starlight made the scene as bright as day.

If they had not already anticipated as much, a glance at the movements of the four men was sufficient to tell that they made up a dueling party.

The principals in the affair were dressed in the suits of officers in the Mexican Army, a regiment of cavalry being at that time stationed at Casas Grande.

The elder of the twain could not have been more than twenty-five, and an American of superb bearing, with the uniform of a major.

His antagonist was younger by a couple of years, and a Mexican, with the commission of a lieutenant in the same regiment.

But the seconds had already measured off the ground, and the duelists stepped into position, each impatient to have the momentous affair over.

"Are you ready, Major Streeter?" asked he whose voice had been first heard.

"Ready," replied the officer.

"And you, Lieutenant Garcia?"

A mumbled affirmative was uttered by the Mexican, who, it could be seen, was trembling violently, when the second said:

"Then, ready! One—two—three—fire!"

The last word had hardly left the lips of the speaker when a sharp report from the major's firearm rang out with a peculiar distinctness on the still scene, quickly followed by that of his antagonist.

Then the latter was seen to throw up his arms, and, with a gurgling sound, fall heavily to the ground.

The other remained untouched, Lieutenant Garcia's bullet having flown wide of the intended victim.

One of the seconds ran to the fallen man's side, to learn the extent of his injury.

"What is the result?" asked the major, as coolly as if inquiring after a hare slain by his unerring rifle.

"Dead!" was the reply.

Jesse James was considering the advisability of addressing the officer, when the other's gaze suddenly caught sight of the two horsemen drawn up near the edge of the growth.

"We are betrayed!" he exclaimed, starting to raise his rifle, but the stentorian voice of Jesse James warned him to desist.

"Hold! we have got the drop on you."

A glance was sufficient to show this fact, and as the startled duelist gazed into the muzzles of the James boys' Winchesters, he asked:

"Who are you, and what is your errand here at this time?"

Aside, to his second, the officer said:

"Have no fear, Mayo; I do not think their appearance has anything to do with the cavalry."

"I want to talk with you," replied Jesse James, tersely, advancing as he spoke.

CHAPTER II.

DEEDS FITTED TO THE DARING.

The James boys' rifles still covering the duelist and his companions, they rode forward until the features of the three men were distinctly seen.

They, however, gave but a glance toward the trembling seconds, who were both Mexicans, as their gaze became fixed upon the American.

Though held at a disadvantage, he showed no signs of fear as he calmly awaited them.

"I am glad to see that you belong to my race," he said; "you will please me most by not coming any nearer, even though countrymen of mine. And if you have anything to say, spit it out. It ought to be easy for you to understand that my time is valuable just now."

The coolness and audacity of the speaker pleased Jesse James.

"We understand your situation, Major Streeter, and will govern ourselves accordingly. To be frank with you, we like your appearance," and as he spoke the weapons were lowered.

"You have the advantage of me," said Streeter. "I do not think I have seen you before."

"You may have heard of us. We are Frank and Jesse James."

Exclamations of fear came from the Mexicans at the mention of the names of the newcomers, and they looked around as if anxious to flee.

"I have heard your names," acknowledged the major, "and I will confess that under the present circumstances I am not sorry to meet you. But I shall have to ask you to make known your errand, for if the truth be spoken I have an engagement for which the time has already passed."

"Of course, after what has happened, you intend to leave the country?"

"If I can run the gantlet of my enemies."

"Which I have no doubt you are capable of doing. But to come to business; we are looking for a man to help us in a little matter we have on hand, and you will just fill the bill, or I am no judge of human nature."

"I have about all on my hands now. I can attend to."

"Perhaps we can help you."

Hesitating a moment before he replied, Major Streeter

then waved his hand to his attendants, whereupon they quickly disappeared.

"I am glad to be rid of them," said the officer. "Now, as I told you, I have a little matter to look after of my own before I can think of anything else. I will confess there is a woman concerned in the case, and no less a personage than the mayor's daughter. It was for her smile that fool lost his life. She will fly with me to the American line this very night."

"Then you may thank me for it, if she does," said Jesse, and in a few words he described the affair at the theatre when Wild Decatur had come so near taking the life of Juniata Gandara.

"I owe you a debt I will try and pay some time," declared Streeter. "But I have already lost too much time. Are you going with me?"

The James brothers held a short consultation between themselves, after which the younger said:

"I am. Frank has a little matter which demands his attention before we leave the town. He will meet us at Valerius Fork. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," and, without further words, Major Streeter and Jesse James started back toward the street, while Frank headed in an opposite direction.

It was very natural that the beautiful and coquettish Juniata Gandara should have other suitors than the gallant major for her hand and fortune (the *fefe politico* was rich in flocks and herds, and had a snug little sum in McManus' bank at Chihuahua), and the most successful of these was Lieutenant Garciary Garcia, of the same regiment.

In fact, it was believed by outsiders that the last had the better prospects, inasmuch as the old mayor, who had not forgotten the time when the hated Texans had overrun his estate, declared that no child of his should marry a "gringo."

Juniata had a mind as well as a heart of her own, it seemed, and while outwardly she had bestowed more attention upon the lieutenant, she had so far yielded to the blandishments and solicitations of the major that an elopement had been planned between them, to occur on the evening of the play of "Don Juan Tenorio."

But it had come near being thwarted by two unlooked-for interruptions.

One of these, as we have seen, was the attempted shooting of Juniata by the discarded lover, Wild Decatur, than whom no more reckless dare-devil ever scourged the frontier of Texas.

At the moment when Major Streeter was flattering himself that his plans were likely to prove successful, by some unknown means Lieutenant Garcia discovered the plot, and would have defeated the aims of the lovers had not his superior officer, in a fit of desperation, deliber-

ately insulted him and called him out to settle in mortal combat the rivalry, with the result we have seen.

In silence, save for the hoofstrokes of their horses, half-muffled by the sand, Jesse James and Al Streeter rode along the main streets of Casas Grande, until, coming to the corner of a dark alley, the latter suddenly stopped and gave a peculiar whistle.

The sound had barely died away before a Mexican boy emerged from the semi-darkness, leading a horse by the bridle.

Jesse saw that the animal had on a woman's saddle, and was a clean-limbed creature, which promised good speed, should occasion call for its fleetness.

"That will do for you, Jose," said Streeter, throwing the boy a silver piece. Then, to Jesse, he continued:

"If you will please remain here a few minutes and look after this horse, I will keep my agreement with Senorita Juniata."

Without waiting for his companion's reply, Major Streeter touched his spirited horse lightly, when the animal started down the street toward the theatre.

Meanwhile, after the brief reign of terror, giving up the chase of the James boys, the excitement had gradually died away, and the audience becoming attentive once more, the acting was resumed as merrily as if nothing had happened.

The Senorita Juniata Gandara had speedily recovered her consciousness, but she had no further interest in the play.

Finally she spoke to her father, and left the box.

Before she had gone far he started after her, and by the time she had reached the door he was beside her.

She gave a hasty glance up and down the street, but, seeing no one except the half-a-dozen loungers about the building, was going to step from the threshold, when her parent caught her by the arm.

She uttered a low cry, feeling that her plans were frustrated.

"I want to go home," she said, excitedly.

"I will go with you," declared the mayor, offering to take her arm.

Before she could reply a horseman, whom she quickly recognized as her lover, dashed up to the place.

"I would have a word with the senorita," he said, saluting the mayor.

With a high-beating heart, Juniata stepped forward, her father having no suspicion of what was to follow.

Major Streeter had not dismounted, and, bending over from his seat, he whispered something to Juniata, when she raised one of her feet to his stirrup.

The next moment the daring lover clasped his left arm around her slender form, to lift her upon the withers of his horse, as if she had been a child.

"Now a ride to safety, my brave maid, and then we can snap our fingers at them," he cried, touching his horse smartly with his spur.

Though done before his very eyes, this daring maneuver had been performed so swiftly that, before the mayor could collect his scattered faculties enough to act, the elopers were flying down the street.

"Stop them!" he yelled. "Don't let the gringo get away with her!"

As had been the case at the time of the escaping James boys, of the spectators who had witnessed the scene not one had a horse handy.

But a second arousing of this sort in one evening was likely to become stirring, and if the men at the door were not able to overtake the fugitives, they could and did do some lively work.

Mayor Gandara was frantic, and he gave his orders with perplexing rapidity and lack of judgment.

No sooner had Major Streeter reached the side of Jesse James than he stopped to help Juniata into the saddle of the loose horse.

"Now keep close beside us, and we will soon be able to laugh at them," said the major. "Ha! they are coming."

"The more the merrier," added Jesse, who was beginning to feel the exhilaration of the excitement. "Away with you," touching his blooded bay lightly on the flank, when the gallant steed shot away like a flash.

At first his companions were unable to keep beside him, but he governed Wingfoot's speed to suit theirs.

The yells of the excited Mexicans could soon be heard on every hand, and the clear, moonlit sky making the scene nearly as light as day, the half-wild pursuers could be seen coming from every alley and dark corner, as well as on the main street.

Going at their flying pace, the fugitives were not long in reaching the boundary of the town, when, looking back, Streeter saw a body of mounted men leading all others in the hot pursuit.

"The cavalry are after me!" he panted. "Press on—faster—faster!"

Scarcely had the words left the major's lips when his horse stumbled, and nearly fell to the earth.

With a great effort the animal regained its feet, but it limped, and quickly showed that it could no longer keep up with the others.

"Curses upon my luck!" exclaimed its rider. "The creature has lamed itself, so it can go no farther."

His companions instantly reined in their animals, and Streeter, dismounting, found that his horse had broken its ankle.

"This is a pretty go," he muttered. "My jig is up; ride on, sir, with the girl, and I will look after myself!"

"No," said Jesse James; "mount the horse behind the girl, and we will trust to fortune to elude our enemies."

The sight of the oncoming cavalry caused Streeter to obey the words of the other, and, without further loss of time, the flight was continued.

The horse bearing the double burden proved to be a powerful animal, so for a while it kept abreast of the fleet-footed bay. But its extra exertion soon began to tell upon its strength, and the gap between them and their pursuers gradually narrowed.

"We must have another horse," said the rider of the bay. "Keep on as fast as possible, and I will soon come up with you."

Streeter then saw him fall purposely behind, and though he felt that the daring man was following a hopeless course, he could do no better than to help carry out his plans.

By this time, coming at a right angle to that of the cavalry, new actors had appeared upon the scene of the exciting drama—half-a-dozen bold horsemen, led by one whose swifter animal enabled him to outstrip them by several rods.

Toward this party the intrepid owner of the bay sped like the wind.

CHAPTER III.

THE TERRIBLE TWAIN.

The very audacity of this course alone enabled the fearless horseman to carry out his dare-devil intentions.

Nonplussed at this action, the Mexicans slackened their headlong gait, while the single rider swooped down upon them like a hawk.

No shots were fired on either side until the rider of the bay was so close upon his foes that he recognized the foremost as the old *fefe politico* of the town, wild over the bold abduction of his daughter.

Whether he recognized the American or not is uncertain, but, at any rate, he covered him with his firearm, when the other's weapon leaped to his shoulder to belch forth its fiery contents.

The mayor's weapon was discharged into the air, as he reeled back in his seat and toppled to the ground.

His followers gave vent to a chorus of yells, followed by the reports of their guns, the leaden rain falling uncomfortably near to the American, who still kept on with unabated speed.

In plain sight of this startling maneuver, the cavalry turned from the pursuit of the fugitives to attack the lone horseman.

As unmindful of the danger he was courting as if such a thing never existed, he urged his fleet Wingfoot toward

the horse a moment before ridden by the *fefe politico* of Casas Grande.

And then he whisked alongside the riderless animal, seized the bridle-rein, and, wheeling his own steed, started back toward the mountains.

All this was done so quickly, under their very hands, that the Mexican rabble saw the audacious American on his second retreat before they had sufficiently recovered to renew their pursuit.

A volley of bullets flew about the fleeing man's head, but shots fired under such circumstances usually fall wide of their mark, and these were no exception to the rule.

In the distance, Streeter and his fair companion could still be discerned, riding for dear life.

As we have seen, the horse of Mayor Gandara was the fleetest among the horde of pursuing horsemen, and that ridden by Jesse James had never found its match, so, escaping the shots of his enemies, the intrepid rider of the bay began to outdistance his pursuers, while he rapidly gained upon his friends.

The plains of the valley of Casas Grande were soon left behind, when the country grew more broken, making the progress of the fugitives necessarily slower.

Finding that the horse ridden by himself and Juniata was faltering under its double burden, Streeter halted for their companion to overtake them.

Nor had he long to wait before the American dashed up.

"Here's a horse for you!" he said. "Climb into the saddle lively."

Streeter needed no second bidding to do this, and while he was making the change, Juniata glanced toward the new animal to exclaim:

"It is father's horse! What does it mean?"

No attention was paid to the question.

The rider of the bay had already started ahead, and the cries of the approaching Mexicans warned the lovers that they hadn't a moment to spare in parley.

If the uneven country made the flight of the fugitives more tedious, it had a like effect upon their pursuers.

In fact, the latter were soon lost sight of, and, in the winding course followed by the leading horseman, the fugitives soon began to breathe easier.

"You have not been harmed, Juniata?" asked Major Streeter, casting lover-like glances toward his fair companion.

"Not in the least; and I cannot hear them now."

"We have little more to fear. I know of a spot where we shall be safe till morning."

"We must be miles from here before daylight," said Jesse James. "But if you know of a secluded spot where we can stop for an hour, so our horses can gain fresh

strength, lead the way. I have always found it good policy to give my horse a rest whenever I could. It is time well employed, and Wingfoot certainly needs a breathing spell now, if he ever did."

They had entered a rocky valley, where their progress was necessarily slow, while the mountains on both sides were coming nearer and nearer together, as if they must meet soon, thus cutting off farther retreat in that direction.

If Jesse James began to mistrust his guide, he said nothing, though his gaze was almost continually upon him.

After advancing a mile or more, with the defile gradually growing narrower all the time, Streeter stopped, saying:

"This is the place. There is a patch of grass just above here where our horses can feed if they wish, and I have no doubt of their desire to do so."

"I don't like the idea of stopping long in such a place as this, major. If we were prepared for a siege it might do well enough, providing we could get no farther; but, if those Greasers should catch up here, we should be fairly cornered."

The isolated spot was hemmed in on three sides by the precipitous sides of the mountains, and to all appearance was a veritable trap to him entering the lonely retreat.

"Not so much of a trap as you think," replied Streeter. "There is a pass through the mountains from the upper end of the valley, which leads out into the Guzman region on the other side. And, what is of vast importance to us, I do not believe our pursuers know of it, so you see we can escape in that direction if they find us here."

"Perhaps that is the better way for us to go," said Jesse, simply, as he dismounted and began to rub the limbs of his faithful steed.

When Jesse had finished his grooming of Wingfoot, and the other horses had received more or less attention from Major Streeter, the three animals were turned loose to feed upon the rich grass growing on the margins of the small stream flowing through the valley.

Suddenly the outlaw shook his finger, saying, in a low tone:

"I hear some one coming down the valley!"

The acute ears of Jesse James had not deceived him and, while the three listened, the sound of the hoofstrokes of a horse grew plainer.

"Some one is coming through the secret pass!" whispered Streeter. "We are lost!"

A smile of contempt curled the bearded lips of Jesse James, as he held his repeating rifle ready to shoot down the approaching horseman, should he, as in all likelihood he would, prove a foe.

Louder and louder grew the regular thud, thud, until

the watchers could see the undergrowth move a short distance ahead.

Streeter had raised his weapon, though it was apparent from the sounds that but one rider was coming.

In a moment the oncomer pushed boldly through the fringes of bushes skirting the entrance to this mountain retreat, and came boldly into sight.

He halted suddenly at sight of the three.

No sooner had he appeared than Jesse James lowered his rifle, saying, quickly, to his companion:

"Don't shoot; it's my brother."

The newcomer was indeed Frank James, and he seemed as surprised at meeting the others as they at seeing him in that out-of-the-way place.

Though four years older than Jesse, he looked younger, from the fact, doubtless, that he wore only a mustache, while his brother wore a full beard.

Like Jesse, he wore a stout, substantial suit of a coarse material and a broad-brimmed slouch hat. He carried in his hands, ready for instant use, a repeating rifle, and the butts of a pair of revolvers were within easy reach.

"Hilloa, Jesse!" he greeted. "I hardly expected to find you waiting for me in this God-forsaken spot."

"Any more than we expected to have you meet us here. You seemed to have got away from Casas Grande without a scratch."

"Oh, yes, though the sleepy old town is in such an uproar as it never knew before. I was taking a short cut to Valerius. You seem in good shape."

"Yes; but how was it you knew of this short cut?"

"Maxmil told me of it, when I got ready to start. And I think he must have been inspired to do so, for nothing could have happened more to our liking."

"Very true. The major told me of it, and we had about decided to follow that course when our horses have rested enough to resume our journey."

During this brief dialogue Juniata had been watching the outlawed brothers, and, shrinking back by the side of her lover, she whispered:

"Come away from those dreadful men. I am afraid of them."

As low as she had spoken, the sharp ears of the terrible twain had caught her words, when Frank James said:

"If you feel safer in the company of the precious soldier, we will leave you. Perhaps, if you knew that the whole town was up in arms for him, you would not object to our company, as our presence is a safeguard to you both. Where do you suppose Lieutenant Garcia is at this moment?"

Major Streeter scowled darkly at the speaker, as if the other had mentioned a subject he did not care to have discussed.

Little wonder if that was the state of his mind.

Perhaps Juniata realized something of what was in his thoughts, for she was greatly disturbed.

"Take me away from here, Al. Oh, this is terrible! Let us go back to Casas Grande."

Frank James smiled.

"Dare you do that, Major Streeter?"

He shook his head.

"No; you are an outlaw, as well as I."

"You have not told me how father's horse came with us," said Juniata, returning to the subject uppermost in her mind.

"Some things are best untold," replied Jesse James. "But, to set your mind at rest, know that I caught the animal, riderless, upon the plain," which was the truth, as far as it went.

At any rate, it had the desired effect upon the maiden.

Giving their horses an hour's rest, the little party then resumed their flight, it having been decided to push on toward the line between the two countries, though a slight detour was to be made by going to Verde, where Major Streeter wished to see one Fray Augustin.

The James boys smiled as they anticipated the object of finding the padre at Verde, but showed their willingness to accompany the others by a nod.

Jesse James had not yet broached the matter uppermost in his mind to Streeter, but was waiting until he could see him away from Juniata. He was not pleased with her company, though he had better judgment than to say so.

"Her presence is going to disarrange our plans," he said aside to Frank.

The sun was about three hours high, the following morning, as four riders cantered leisurely along the single street of Verde, arousing the indolent inhabitants to a sense of curiosity at their appearance.

As may be imagined, the quartette was made up of the James boys, Major Streeter and Juniata Gandara, the gantlet of their enemies having been safely run so far.

"Fray Augustin lives at the upper part of the town," said Streeter.

"While the rest of you are paying him a visit," said Jesse, "I will look the town over, and, if it's as dead as it seems, I shall be ready to get out as soon as you are. You won't need me at the padre's, I hardly think."

"You aren't going to kick up a dust are you, Jess?" asked Frank, who saw better than the others his brother's uneasiness. The more cautious of the two, he frequently warned Jesse to be less reckless in his actions.

"Oh, no," replied the younger; "at least, only a smudge. Why, you couldn't get up a fuss in this dead hole if you tried with a firebrand."

He was soon to learn that rotten wood will sometimes make the hottest blaze.

Leaving his companions to carry out their intentions, Jesse James continued along the dusty street, keeping a sharp lookout right and left as he advanced.

Presently he came to a small station of the railroad running through the town, and, seeing a man sitting in the shade of the building, complacently smoking some tobacco rolled in corn shuck, he addressed him:

"*Como se ra, senor.*"

"Well, what will you have?" asked the other, bluntly, in unexpected English.

"So you speak the tongue of a man, if you are not one yourself," said Jesse. "I am glad of that, for I must allow that my Spanish is of about as much use as a broken-back colt. How do you manage to draw breath in this dead hole?"

"Reckon I manage to suck it in with the dust," replied the Mexican, who was eying the other closely. "Just come to town?"

"Looks like it."

"Bring any news?"

"A horse load—more or less. They are having a rattling old time in Casas Grande."

"It's like them. What is specially up?"

"Oh, a couple of the officers of the cavalry have been shooting each other."

"Not much to that."

"The mayor's daughter has eloped with one of her lovers."

"Had no better opinion of her."

"And the mayor, her father, was shot while trying to overtake her."

"No great loss to Casas Grande."

Jesse was losing his patience at the other's indifference.

"They say Jesse James was shot there last night, and the whole town is up in arms after his brother."

"Not much to that. Reckon Jesse James is as easy to be shot as any—the devil! there comes a man worth shooting."

The clatter of a galloping horse's hoofs broke upon the silence of the morning, and Jesse James uttered a sharp cry of surprise, as he recognized the oncoming rider.

It was Wild Decatur.

CHAPTER IV.

WAKING THE DEAD.

The horseman was Wild Decatur!

His long, yellow hair was streaming in the air as he urged his stout-built Mexican pony on at the top of its speed, his bloodshot eyes taking in every unusual object as he dashed through the town.

At sight of Jesse James he stopped his horse with an abruptness which threw the creature upon its haunches.

"He's looking for some one!" exclaimed the Mexican, starting to his feet.

"Let that look for him, then!" cried Jesse James, taking a swift aim at the other with his rifle and pulling the trigger.

With a cry of pain on his lips, Wild Decatur fell back upon his horse, which, aroused by the shot, fled down the street.

"See if that bit of lead won't fix you," exclaimed Jesse, as he watched the retreating horse, with its helpless burden.

"A good shot," declared the Mexican; "and it's worth a thousand dollars."

The exciting scene had so aroused the impulsive nature of the reckless outlaw that he was prompted to exclaim:

"Shut your mouth on such fol-de-rol! Here's a head on these shoulders of mine worth fifty times that, and you can have it for the picking!"

The Mexican stared upon him, dumfounded.

"Come! do you pluck it like a berry, or eat your words?"

Still the other remained speechless.

The outlaw wheeled his horse with a grunt of disgust.

"Like all the rest!" he cried. "But I'll wake the dead of this dead hole, or my name isn't Jesse James."

Turning in his seat, he fired over the Mexican's head, the bullet cutting a hole in the startled man's sombrero, and burying itself in the wall behind him.

"Shake up the dirty dust of this dry hole, Wingfoot!" shouted the outlaw, urging the noble quadruped away from the station.

Turning an angle in the street, he came suddenly upon a more pretentious building than the general run of structures in Verde, and which he quickly judged to be the town bank, without stopping to read the weather-beaten placard over its doors.

Suddenly checking Wingfoot's swinging pace, he threw himself from the saddle, and, leaving the trained horse unhitched at the door, entered the building.

At this early hour it happened that only the teller and one of the clerks were in the bank, and these looked up in surprise at the appearance of the American.

"Gold for these due bills," demanded Jesse James, displaying a handful of paper money, though without releasing his hold upon it.

Bewildered by the unexpected demand, the official turned the key in the money drawer, and, pulling out the receptacle, thus displayed the different compartments filled with gold and bills.

"Never mind about any more!" cried the audacious robber, springing nimbly over the counter, and placing one of his cocked revolvers at the terrified teller's face. "But I must trouble you to ask your chum there to chuck

the whole of it into that bag at your feet. I won't trouble you to sort the trash."

The clerk glanced hastily around to see that no one was in sight to lend his assistance, and the peril of his companion took away what little courage he possessed.

"How long is it going to take you to do it, old fly-trap?" asked the daring robber. "My time is worth a hundred dollars an hour, but your chum's here isn't worth but a pinch of powder, if you don't hustle."

Not daring to delay longer, the clerk did as he was requested, in his fright spilling some of the coins on the floor.

"Confound your carelessness! Pick 'em lively, or I'll make you eat the whole lot."

When this last order had been obeyed, Jesse James dealt the teller a blow on the side of the head, which sent him sprawling to the floor.

Then, felling the clerk beside the other, he leaped back over the counter, to find himself confronted by the Mexican whom he had seen at the station.

"*Cospita!*"

Jesse James' exclamation was drowned by the sharp report of his revolver and the death cry of the Mexican.

Carrying the money bag in his left hand, the outlaw rushed out of the bank and bounded into the saddle.

He saw a knot of men collected in the street below him, and three or four were approaching the place from one of the cross streets.

Without further delay, he dashed into the direction he expected to find his friends, quickly pursued by some of the aroused citizens of Verde.

It had not been over ten minutes since he had parted with his companions, and in less than half that time the town was likely to be wide-awake enough to suit even Jesse James.

At that very moment an element was swiftly approaching the place which was capable of giving the fugitives more trouble than all of the inhabitants of Verde.

The eastern horizon was marked at one point with a dull streak, which rapidly showed itself to be a cloud of dust, and out of this dusky body a party of horsemen took shape.

Frank James was watching the dim outlines fast coming into shape, while he waited in front of the padre's adobe dwelling for the performance of the ceremony that was to make Major Streeter and Juniata Gandara man and wife, when the report of Jesse's revolver caused him to turn abruptly in the other direction.

"I might have known it," he muttered. "He can no more help it than the sun can help shining. I wish that old priest would get through with his mumbling and bungling."

Frank had not dismounted, and he rode a short distance down the street, looking anxiously in every direction.

Though no unusual sound reached his alert ears, after the first shot, for a few minutes, even the silence seemed to tell him that Jesse James was stirring up a hornet's nest.

Then the suspense was broken by the yells of the startled Mexicans.

A moment later Jesse dashed into sight, and, upon seeing Frank approaching, he held up the bag of gold, saying:

"Been collecting some of the bounty offered for us, Frank; thought it had been standing long enough."

"I am afraid you have bitten off more'n you can chew, Jess."

"The devil I have! I intend to make this my farewell visit to this infernal country, and I'm bound to do something for 'em to remember us by."

They were both riding toward the padre's abode now.

Looking for the approaching horsemen, Frank James saw that they were close upon the town, while bearing swiftly and silently down upon them.

Al Streeter and his wife were standing in the doorway of the padre's adobe dwelling when they reached the place.

"Look here!" exclaimed the first, pointing toward the oncoming riders, "the cavalry have tracked us down. We must fly to the mountains."

"Into your saddles!" thundered Frank James. "The whole town is at our heels!"

Had the James boys been alone, there is little doubt but they would have escaped the hand-to-hand struggle which succeeded.

But while they waited for their companions to mount their horses, the cavalry entered the town.

The citizens, too, had armed themselves, and appeared upon the scene in an incredible time, considering the apparent sleepiness of the place a quarter of an hour before.

The most favorable course for them to follow seemed toward the west, and thither Jesse James led the way, having secured, in the brief delay, the bag of gold to his saddle, so his hands were free to use those death-dealing firearms of his.

Close beside him rode Frank, while upon the latter's heels followed Al Streeter and his wife.

The last must have been a brave woman, for she had shown little signs of fear thus far, though, at sight of the wild horde coming from every quarter upon them, her nut-brown skin looked almost white, and she clutched the rein of her horse with a nervous hold.

"Clear the way, ye yaller skins!" yelled Jesse, as he shot down one of their enemies who had been foolhardy enough to get within range of his revolvers.

The cavalry was in hot pursuit from their rear, while the citizens were forming from the right and left, which left the front comparatively clear, and an escape to be reasonably expected.

But, at the first volley from the Mexicans, Juniata's horse gave a shrill neigh of pain, and staggered as if it would fall.

The animal had been hit in one of its hind legs, above the gambrel joint.

Even then the faithful creature might have borne its rider to safety, but as if the pursuing Mexicans had selected the brute as their especial target, another bullet, better directed than the others, pierced its vitals.

The horse sank to the earth, pinning its rider under its body to the ground.

Streeter had checked his own flight ere the sharp cry of Juniata had reached his ears, and, wheeling around, he dashed back to her rescue.

Leaping from his saddle, the daring officer seized hold of the dead animal to lift its body from his imprisoned wife.

But when Juniata attempted to regain her feet, she found she could not stand.

One of her ankles had been strained, if not broken.

Her husband caught her in his arms, to lift her upon his horse, but, before he had accomplished the feat, a stray bullet from the oncoming horde struck the animal in the neck, causing the maddened creature to bound away with a snort of terror.

Streeter's escape was now completely cut off.

Meanwhile, the James boys had not been unmindful of his critical situation, and, abandoning their own chances of getting clear, they turned upon their pursuers to the defense of their companions.

Their terrible rifles belched forth such a continual fire that the oncoming cavalry actually reeled back in its wild charge.

"Fly!" shouted Frank James, "while we cover your retreat!"

Lifting his wife in his arms, Streeter ran as fast as he could at right angles from the meeting-point of the two parties.

Following up the advantage they had gained, the James boys continued to pour their galling fire into the midst of the mounted Mexicans, without slackening the furious approach of their trained horses, which needed no guiding to keep them on the right course.

In vain the chief of the cavalry tried to rally his forces.

A random volley of shot was fired at the terrible twain, and, seeing them still sweeping upon them, the troops wheeled and fled!

Wild confusion followed, the enemies scattering in every direction.

Streeter soon reached the railroad track, and, seeing a handcar just above the station, he quickly resolved to appropriate it to his use.

Accordingly, placing his wife upon the platform, he pushed the car down the switch and upon the main track before the Mexicans had rallied from their defeat at the hands of the James boys sufficiently to turn upon him.

Springing aboard the car then, he sent it flying down the rails with all the force he could muster.

Fortunately, it was down grade for a long distance, and the wheels, gaining new impetus at every revolution, sent the clumsy vehicle flying along the iron way.

By this time the Mexicans had rallied from the attack of the James boys, and a score of mounted men gave chase to Streeter and his wife, sending a volley of bullets whistling about their heads.

A road running parallel with the track enabled them to keep close upon the course of the couple.

But Streeter, working for dear life, felt confident of outdistancing his pursuers, until, in the midst of his wild work, the sharp whistle of an approaching engine rang above the tumult of the wild chase.

He knew in a moment he was rushing straight into the very jaws of death!

The James boys heard the shriek of the approaching train, and, in the distance, saw a faint ring of smoke rising over the track.

"Follow me, Frank!" cried Jesse, urging Wingfoot alongside of the railroad.

The other unhesitatingly obeyed, and, side by side, they sped upon the heels of the pursuers of Streeter, they, in turn, chased by the balance of the cavalry and the entire town.

CHAPTER V.

DESPERATE CHANCES.

With the Mexican mob in wild pursuit, following closely and swiftly upon his heels and the train rushing toward him, Streeter's face turned deadly pale, though, almost unconsciously, he continued to work the handle of the handcar.

Better, perhaps, a quick death before the engine than capture at the hands of his enemies, who would put him to the worst of tortures, he thought, as he sped along the gleaming rails, sweeping each moment nearer and nearer to the oncoming train.

Though amazed at the very madness of his flight, while confident that he could escape them only by meeting death before the engine, the Mexican cavalry dashed alongside of the track in unabated pursuit.

Behind this squad, the most self-possessed of the pur-

sued and pursuers, came Frank and Jesse James, in turn chased by the townspeople on foot.

Jesse was in the lead of his brother, his eyes flashing like coals of fire, and his whole countenance marked with the desperate determination of his nature.

He had dropped the rein on Wingfoot's withers, while he clutched in either hand one of his death-dealing revolvers.

The flying pace of his gallant horse soon brought him close upon the squad of cavalry pursuing Al Streeter.

"On, Wingfoot, on! Ride the devils down!"

The trained steed, which had carried him through so many hairbreadth escapes, understood his purpose, and proved equal to it.

Above the clatter of hoofs rang the reports of Jesse James' firearms, every shot of which emptied a Mexican saddle.

Divining his brother's intention of dashing around the horde of Mexican riders, Frank James followed the other less than half the length of his horse behind him, discharging his own weapons as soon as Jesse opened the attack.

Some of the Mexicans turned in their seats to meet their pursuing foes, only to gaze into the muzzles of the weapons, which, the next moment, sent them reeling to the ground, while their riderless horses kept madly on, adding to the confusion of the exciting scene.

The inhabitants of Verde who had given pursuit to the James boys had not dared to fire more than a few desultory shots since the opening of the race, fearing they would kill their own countrymen in front of the Americans, so there was little danger to the latter from their rear on this account.

All this had taken place in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, and the James brothers had broken into the midst of the rushing troops and cut a path through them, the fleetness of their horses enabling them to overtake and pass the panic-stricken party.

Al Streeter was soon passed by Wingfoot, though still sweeping on with unabated speed, his white face turned alternately backward and forward, from one to the other deadly danger.

The train was in plain sight, coming up the track like a huge serpent, breathing fire and smoke.

The escape of the James brothers would have been comparatively easy at this stage of the adventure, but Al Streeter and his wife's fates were sealed unless they went to their rescue. Just how to save them might have daunted a less sanguine and reckless nature than that of Jesse James.

Witnessing the peril of Streeter, for whom he had conceived a liking, Jesse did not feel like deserting him in his terrible danger, and, glancing from the handcar to the

approaching train, a desperate plan formed itself in his mind.

The thrilling situations were following each other too rapidly to admit of any consideration as to what might be the outcome of any action.

The railroad track still ran near to the road, and parallel to it, and, guiding his horse near to the gleaming rails, he rose in his stirrups as the train came thundering toward him.

"Keep on, Frank, and look out for Wingfoot!" he shouted.

Anticipating his intentions, the other shouted to him to desist from his mad purpose; but his voice was drowned by the roar of the train.

The yells of the cavalymen died away, as they halted with dismay at sight of the daring movement of the noted desperado.

Jesse James, as he came abreast of the approaching train, swung himself clear from his horse without checking the animal's speed, and with a leap which would have outdone many an acrobat, he sprang aboard the cab beside the amazed engineer and his helper.

All this was done before Frank James could abate his own wild flight, though the next moment he pulled in Queen with a suddenness that brought her back upon her haunches.

But the swiftly-moving train had already carried Jesse James beyond him, and, seeing his helplessness to aid his brother, Frank renewed his flight, calling to Wingfoot to keep beside him, which the faithful animal did.

Meanwhile, no sooner had Jesse James gained the cab than he felled the engineer at his feet, to seize the lever in his own grasp.

His arm shot back with a lightning-like movement, while he whistled for brakes, and prepared to bring the train to a sudden stop.

In a moment a mighty convulsion seemed to shake the iron horse and a shudder ran along its steel limbs.

The biting brakes for an instant failed to overcome the powerful momentum of the train, and the wheels scraped upon the rails, until the destruction of the handcar and its occupants seemed certain.

What their sensation was as they saw the fiery monster rushing upon them would be difficult to describe.

Juniata uttered a piercing scream, while her companion at last paused in his wild work of propelling the car, and had he been alone, he would have leaped for his life.

Another yard—another foot, and they would not have lived to tell what had struck them.

Al Streeter looked up with dismay.

Juniata was half-unconscious of what was taking place around her.

"Jump up here!" cried the voice of Jesse James. "Come, lively."

A portion of the cavalymen had been passed, but others were abreast of the train, and behind them the citizens of Verde.

At the command from the outlaw, Streeter rallied.

He realized that the train had come to a sudden standstill within arms' length of the handcar, and saw, moreover, the grim countenance of his would-be preserver at the cab window.

Lifting his wife in his arms, the officer staggered from the handcar and ran along the cab, where Jesse leaned down and helped lift Juniata upon the engine.

No sooner was this done than he threw open the throttle, and, puffing and snorting as if with rage, the iron horse again started on its way.

Streeter leaped upon the platform as the train was beginning to move.

Thus far the Mexicans had been too bewildered by the very boldness of the proceedings to attack the escaping parties.

They might have shot Streeter and his wife ere they had left the handcar, but not a shot had been fired until it was too late.

Too late?

A volley of bullets whistled around the heads of those on the cab, and one wounded the fireman in the left arm.

The others were untouched.

Jesse James at the lever did not look around.

The scene in front demanded all of his attention.

As the train began to move, slowly at first, and then gradually faster, the handcar, which, of course, was still on the track, was pushed back, and sent several feet by the concussion of the blow.

Jesse James knew his only chance of escape was to keep on, and had it not been for the obstruction of the track this would have been a simple, if not a safe, undertaking.

But the handcar trebled his danger.

Still, by a smart blow, he hoped to throw the structure clear from the track.

The crisis came in a moment.

The engine had leaped on in its course at his bidding with a shriek and a bound.

The cowcatcher caught the obstruction fairly up, to send it flying into the air.

It fell in the midst of the Mexicans, who made the scene hideous with their yells.

The track was now clear.

Jesse James smiled grimly, as he glanced toward the terrified Mexicans, several of whom had been killed or injured by the falling car.

By this time the train was thundering along the track at tremendous speed.

Shots came from their enemies, but they had little to fear from them, even if they should try to follow.

The station at Verde was quickly reached, where it was seen that a crowd of men, women and children had gathered, all of whom uttered a series of wild cries as the train dashed past, though they could not have understood the true situation.

"Well, we gave them the slip then in a way they little thought," declared Jesse James, as he slackened their flight somewhat. "Are either of you—ha! I'll attend to you."

The last clause was called forth by the fact that the engineer was showing signs of returning consciousness.

"Lie still!" he commanded, covering the man with one of his revolvers. "I am running this train now."

So far the fireman, suffering from his disabled arm, had stood a mute witness of the scene. But the sight of the engineer's helpless situation aroused him, and, pulling a six-shooter from his pocket, he took hasty aim at the outlaw and fired.

Jesse James' life was saved by Al Streeter, who, seeing his peril, dealt the fireman's arm a blow which caused him to discharge the firearm into the air.

The next moment Streeter drew one of his weapons, and, leveling it at the other's head, he exclaimed:

"Lift a hand at the peril of your life!"

"It's no use, Atle!" said the engineer, who had no desire to risk his life in any further resistance. "We're trapped, and all on account of that cursed gold. I told the company we could not get through without being held up by bandits.

"You will spare our life, senors?"

"If you don't try to act the fool," replied Jesse James. "Obey my orders, and I'll promise your life shall be safe as long as mine is.

"Take your old place, and keep this old carriage humming. Mind, no fooling."

Jesse James' cocked revolver was within an inch of his temple, and, without delay, the engineer took his post, when his captor stepped back, though he did not allow his gaze to leave the trembling Mexican.

They were rushing on through an unpopulated country at a fair rate of speed. But by this time, the firebox needed attention.

The outlaw pointed to the helper, and Streeter, understanding his meaning, ordered the other to resume his duty, a command the suffering wretch dared not disobey.

Until this time Juniata had remained inactive and quiet, the fearful ordeal seeming more to her like an awful dream than an affair of real life.

Her ankle was paining her severely, and she could not suppress exclamations of pain.

"Oh, Al! Isn't the danger over? This has been dreadful."

"Have courage a little longer, my dear, and we shall be out of it."

"How far do you intend to run, Mr. James?"

"Perhaps to El Paso. We mustn't think of stopping till we have run the dust of Verde off of our wheels."

The cries of their enemies were no longer heard, but what the passengers of the coaches thought mattered little to Jesse James. Already he was thinking of the gold hinted at by the engineer, and he was trying to evolve some plan whereby he might gain possession of it.

"If Frank were only here," he thought. "Ah! I wonder how the boy is getting on. Mean trick of mine to run off in that way, but I couldn't see any other course under the circumstances."

In a moment his mind was clear as to what he thought best to do.

"Look here, Streeter, I'm going to leave these chaps in your care for a while. I must go back to look after matters there. Don't hesitate to shoot the Greasers if one of them shows the least treachery."

With these words the outlaw began to climb over the tender toward the baggage-car.

What his business was in that direction Al Streeter half guessed, but he knew the character of the man too well to remonstrate. What was he himself that he should care for the welfare of the Mexican rabble on board the train? For the sake of his suffering wife he was anxious only to get out of that country, knowing he was not safe until the line was reached.

Though he had passed his life amid scenes of excitement, seeking adventure, Al Streeter had not reached that state of heart and mind where crime should be a solace for every wound done to him. How near he was to that borderland even he did not realize at that time.

In the meantime Jesse James had reached the baggage-car, and coming unexpectedly upon the three men in charge of the same, he hurled them to the floor and bound and gagged them before they could cry out.

A glance about the car showed him the treasure chest referred to by the engineer, and a smile of satisfaction overspread his countenance.

"It might as well stay here until I conclude to stop the train," he mused. "But as we are liable to pursuit, it is folly for us to pull the rest of the train any further. I don't see the use of giving a free ride to those Greasers in the coaches, and as I cannot stop to take up their tickets, I will let their excursion end here."

Satisfying himself that his prisoners were not likely to get free, he went back to the rear platform and pulled the

coupling-pin holding the next car with its companions following.

They were leaving a slight elevation at the time, and descending a down-grade, the loosened coaches kept closely upon the engine and baggage-car, until Jesse began to think something serious might come of the pursuit.

An up-grade was soon reached, however, when the engine, with its slight load, shot rapidly ahead of the pursuing train, which, as soon as the momentum had ceased, ran back into the hollow, where the cars came to an abrupt standstill.

"Sorry we haven't got our new station ready for you!" shouted back Jesse James, derisively, as he was borne on; "but when you ride with——"

A medley of shouts and yells suddenly rang above the roar of the engine, and then rifle shots followed in rapid succession.

Glancing out of the door, he saw that they had been attacked by a body of troops.

CHAPTER VI.

DRIVEN TO THE WALL.

"My God! They have killed Juniata!"

The cry came from Al Streeter, immediately following the volley of bullets which rattled about the engine.

He had stood on the alert over the captive engineer and fireman, while Jesse James had gone on his errand of robbery. Then he had realized the breaking apart of the train by the sudden impetus given the engine, and he wondered what had become of his companion.

Then his reflections were cut short by the startling yells of the wayfarers as they sprang from the roadside to pour their galling fire about the heads of their friends and foes, regardless of consequences.

He saw the mob springing from every quarter, felt the engine give a tremendous leap as it struck some obstacle on the track, and then a sharp cry from his wife called his attention from everything else to her.

She had sunk back upon the platform, with a stream of blood oozing from her side, while she lay motionless where she had fallen.

Forgetting the others, Al Streeter bent over her to see at a glance that the shot had been fatal.

With the agonizing cry we have quoted, he stood grief-stricken.

The engineer saw his opportunity, and instantly reversed the lever, when the throbbing monster of iron suddenly checked its wild advance with an impetuosity that nearly threw the Mexican from his feet.

Improving his chance, the fireman leaped from the

machine, flying headlong through the air, in his passage to the ground, and falling in a heap, half-a-dozen rods away.

Renewed yells came from the besieging crowd, and the further flight of the fugitives seemed over.

But Jesse James was already rushing to the scene, regardless of the danger to himself.

Reaching the side of the exultant engineer, he seized the other in his herculean grasp and flung him from the cab into space.

Then, throwing open the valve again, he sent the iron horse leaping along the track.

Another volley of bullets was fired by the surprised assailants, but the shots flew wide of their victims, and the engine rushed on with increasing speed, soon passing beyond the last of the Mexicans.

When Jesse felt they were comparatively safe again, he looked toward his companion, and saw that he was still bending over the unconscious form of his wife.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"Curse them! For every drop of her blood a life shall be shed!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse tone, rising to his feet.

That look on his face Jesse James never forgot.

"It is destiny," he said; "it is destiny with the iron which enters every man's soul. I feel that the day is not far off when a wife and mother at home will wait for Jesse James in vain.

"I don't hear anything more of the red-handed Greasers," he said, changing the subject.

"How could that party have known we were ahead?" asked his companion.

"They must have telegraphed to the next station."

"If they have done that once, may they not do it again?"

"Possibly; we must take our chances."

"Do you think your brother has escaped?"

"That is what is troubling me now. I saw a lot of the mounted Greasers giving him pursuit. But his horse can outrun anything they have, I'll warrant; to say nothing of Wingfoot to help him out. Yes, by this time I think Frank is snapping his fingers at them, and, it may be, wondering where we are."

"How will you find each other?"

Jesse James smiled.

"Don't you think we had made arrangements for that? Why, we never part without having an understanding where we are to meet next.

"When we came into this country we selected a meeting-place for us in case of just such emergencies as these. I shall go there as soon as convenient, and wait for him a couple of days. If he don't come by that time I shall know that he is in trouble."

Little was said for the next hour, during which they

passed three stations, and the rest of their flight was through a wild stretch of wilderness.

Streeter performed the work of the fireman, while his companion acted as engineer.

They had not left the wooded district, though Jesse James judged they must be near the edge of its growth, when he suddenly held up his finger, as if in warning of further danger.

"We are chased," he said. "Hark! Don't you hear another engine on the track?"

Now that his attention had been called to the fact, Al Streeter imagined he did hear an unusual rumbling behind them, which rapidly increased in volume, showing that whoever was in pursuit was gaining upon them.

"Give me all the steam possible, Al," said Jesse. "We shall need it."

He had barely spoken when a blaze of crimson light leaped across their pathway.

Swinging around a slight curve, they came into sight of a network of flames festooning the growth which overhung the track ahead.

"They have fired the woods!" exclaimed Jesse James.

A moment later he saw that it was more than a brush fire on the sides of the road.

The track crossed a stream of considerable size at this place, and the bridge spanning the river was already enveloped in flames!

"It's the work of the devilish Greasers!" exclaimed Jesse James, through his clinched teeth.

By abandoning the engine and taking to the woods they might escape, though even that course was hazardous.

To keep on seemed like courting death, but Streeter saw to his horror that his companion showed no indication of stopping.

"Hold on!" he cried. "It is death to cross the river!"

But the thought of the treasure on the car had fired Jesse James' mind with the determination to take the awful consequences in attempting to cross the bridge.

The underwork of the structure was all ablaze, while the flames had caught upon the girders overhead.

Nothing daunted, Jesse James held upon the lever with unflinching determination to make the passage or perish in the attempt. The strong wind flung the smoke and cinders into his face, almost blinding him as they rushed along the gleaming track.

Al Streeter saw the glimmer of the water at the foot of the river's high banks, reflecting back the ghastly red of the conflagration, and then he closed his eyes as a dense cloud of smoke filled his face, and a fusillade of burning embers and coals of fire fell about him. The next moment he felt the foundation beneath the engine tremble under its weight, when he knew they were on the doomed structure.

Then a breath of fresh air fanned his feverish brow, and he seemed to be upon solid earth once more, as the train swept on as steadily as before. As he opened his eyes, a crash which fairly made the ground tremble rang out far and near, and, looking back, he saw that a yawning gulf stretched where they had a moment before crossed over the river.

The track followed the river bank for some distance on this side, so that, while he gazed upon the wreck, he saw the pursuing train stop at the brink of the chasm, when a body of armed men swarmed from the cars.

Jesse James had seen this, and a smile lightened his grim features, as he shook his fist defiantly toward his baffled pursuers.

A volley of bullets answered his defiance, but the escaping men were beyond harm.

Meanwhile, how had it fared with Frank James?

The daring movement of his brother for a moment stayed him in his flight; but the moving train quickly carried Jesse from his sight.

He was sure, however, he had gained the cab and was on the way to escape. It behooved him, then, to look after his own safety. Accordingly, he urged his spirited horse forward, calling at the same time to the trained Wingfoot to follow him.

His break for freedom was made none too soon.

Defeated in their attempt to capture the others, the Mexicans gave pursuit to him, who seemed within their reach. All of the cavalry joined in this chase, and such of the inhabitants of Verde as had horses, besides many others who fell in with them from time to time.

If less active when on his feet than his brother, and his lameness was more than anything else the cause of this, he was Jesse's equal in horsemanship, while the horse he rode—a coal-black mare he had named *Queen*—could almost hold her own with Wingfoot at his best.

It would thus seem that Frank's escape was a foregone conclusion, but he was in a strange country, and liable to run into the midst of a body of his foes, who were likely to surround him at any quarter.

He was aware that he must change his direction in order to reach the American line, and that every step taken in his present course was leading him into more intricate dangers.

Still confident of his ultimate escape, he kept on without crowding the horses to their utmost, knowing it might be a long time before he could allow them rest.

A dozen miles below Verde he turned off from the road and shaped his flight across the country stretching toward the lower Rio Grande, hoping by a gradual detour to gain the course he desired.

A cloud of dust in the distance behind him marked the pursuit of the cavalry, and he had not gone a quarter of

a mile from the highway before he discovered a body of horsemen coming from the opposite direction, telling him that if he had not shifted his course just as he had, he would have suddenly found himself held up by his enemies.

Across an open plain for five miles he sped, with *Queen* doing her best, the unriden Wingfoot keeping easily by her side.

Then Frank James changed to the latter, so he was enabled to keep on with unabated speed, while he was gradually leaving out of sight his pursuers.

They did not give up the chase without further effort, but the last they saw of Frank James his figure was outlined against the starlit sky as he crossed one of the table ridges to the south. The next moment man and horses vanished into the space beyond.

Before morning Frank James was many miles from the ruins of the old mission of Rio del Antonio, and comparatively safe from his enemies.

He kept on to Sareda, where a friend of theirs by the name of Bent Turner was living at that time, and there he awaited the coming of his brother.

As we have seen, Jesse James and his companion felt comparatively safe with the river between them and their enemies.

Still, they were in the heart of a hostile land, so it was necessary for them to be continually on the alert.

They held to the engine and baggage-car until reaching the border of the Santos district, when Jesse proposed they abandon the railroad.

Al Streeter was so crazed over the death of his wife that it was only with great difficulty that his companion prevailed upon him to go to Sareda.

Finally he consented, and, after seeing that Juniata had received proper burial, he followed after Jesse, who had not thought best to remain long in that vicinity.

The latter had made no secret of his robbery to the other, who showed no regret over what had been done. In fact, the iron had entered Al Streeter's soul, and from that hour when he had seen his wife shot down by his side he seemed more like a fiend than a human being.

The gold was boxed in the most careless manner, apparently, and taken along as luggage to Sareda.

The meeting between the outlawed brothers was most cordial, but Jesse declared that the sooner they crossed the line the better. Accordingly they started the next day. And with a stop in the meantime at one of their rendezvous, they came back into New Mexico, accompanied by Al Streeter.

The active and fertile minds of this twain were never at rest, and, notwithstanding the rich hauls they had secured in Verde and elsewhere, they were already plan-

ning one of the most daring and gigantic of their many robberies.

During their preparations for this event the brothers made their stopping-place at a cabin on the old Wooton trail, now raised to the dignity of a highway connecting Afton with Riddington, and from thence running on to Kettle Spring.

It was five miles from this cabin, on a peak commanding a wide view of the surrounding country, that Jesse had established himself on the morning of October 7.

Gazing first toward the north, he saw nothing to arrest his attention, though the deep rumbling of heavy wheels fell upon his ears, and he anticipated that the Astoria stage was coming.

He had scarcely turned to look in the opposite course when his sharp eye discovered a horseman riding leisurely up the road.

Fitting his glass to his eyes, he quickly saw that the rider was not the man he was looking for, but as he watched him a smile came over Jesse James' face.

"I can't be mistaken," he mused. "It must be—it is, Bill Brazelton, the Lone Highwayman! What can he be doing in this vicinity?"

Jesse James continued to watch the approaching horseman, his interest in him increasing every moment.

"I couldn't find a better man to join us at this time than Bill. I must speak to him."

By this time the stage, as well as the horseman, was nearing the point in the road opposite him, where it seemed they must meet.

Not caring to be seen by the occupants of the stage, Jesse James shifted his position, so he was hidden by a clump of bushes to any one in the road, though he could look out and see what was taking place.

He was about to witness an exciting scene.

Bill Brazelton, noted far and wide as the Lone Highwayman—and, though the epithet has been bestowed upon others, none ever deserved it more than he—when he heard the stage rapidly nearing him, urged his horse into the bushes by the roadside, where, concealed from sight, he silently waited the approach of the coach.

He had slipped a mask over the upper half of his face, and as the vehicle whisked around a curve in the road to come into full sight, he suddenly appeared upon the scene with a cocked revolver in either hand.

"Hold up, driver, or you are a dead man!"

Hank Smith was too old a "knight of the ribbons" not to know the deadly meaning of that command, and, with surprising celerity, he checked the horses, to bring them to a standstill directly in front of the Lone Highwayman.

"I reckon I'm the mos' obligenest feller this side White Wove, mister. Anything more I can do for you?"

"Hold your tongue as well as your horses. While you are about it you might as well throw me down that treasure parcel under your seat."

"Sartinly, mister man, seein' as it'll save yer clamberin' up hyur. It takes a right smart big of an exertion to clumb up hyur, as I hev tole——"

"Stop your gab and hand down that treasure!" interrupted the highwayman, impatiently. "I am not working by the month."

"Oh! doin' the wuk by the job, eh? Hope you'll 'scuse my slowness," mumbled the driver, while he fumbled under the seat for the demanded valuables.

It would have been folly, as far as his own welfare was concerned, for Hank Smith to have resisted the robber. He was not hired for that purpose, in fact; but it was a trait of his sluggish nature to delay the other's action as long as possible.

"Who have you got inside?" demanded Bill Brazelton, when he had got possession of the coveted treasure.

"Only two pilgrims—an ol' man and his darter. No show there, 'cording to 'pearances."

"I will see about that myself," at the same time flinging open the coach door.

"Hilloa, there! No fuss, if you value your lives. Just hand over what few trinkets you happen to have 'long with you."

A woman's scream followed the highwayman's words, and his firearms were thrust into the faces of the couple in the stage.

"Stop that noise! Hand over your trinkets—lively!"

"Oh, sir, you won't harm us?" implored the woman, whom Brazelton saw was young—not more than eighteen—and extremely beautiful.

The two passengers were, in fact, the Hon. John Marchmount and his only daughter, Flora. Mr. Marchmount had really nearly a hundred thousand dollars with him at that time, so snugly stowed away in some old clothing that he had fondly hoped it would escape the eyes of any chance robber.

He was a man then about sixty, though his years had not robbed him of the courage of his younger days, and had it not been for the presence of his daughter he would have made a desperate attempt to defend his property. As it was, he said:

"Let him have what you have got, Flora. Here is my pocketbook, sir. I trust you will not further molest an old man and his daughter."

"Not if you hand over all you have. That is not all. There is a respectful little sum wrapped up in those old clothes I am particularly interested in."

Mr. Marchmount could not suppress a cry of despair.

"I will give you just five seconds in which to hand it over, or I will blow your brains to kingdom come."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHINGLE OF THE ACRE OF CRIME—KING KINGSLEY'S COMPACT.

Suddenly Bill Brazelton heard the swift, light hoof-strokes of an unshod horse approaching, and, glancing up, he was amazed to see an unknown rider directly in front of him.

Then, before he could lift an arm, the newcomer dealt him a blow which sent him reeling from his seat.

The next moment the stranger sprang to the ground, and, seizing the highwayman in his arms, he lifted him up, with the evident intention of thrusting him into the coach.

At that instant the sharp report of a rifle rang out, and a bullet, cutting away a lock of the captor's hair, plowed an ugly furrow along his forearm, so that he dropped the form of the unconscious robber to turn abruptly about.

Jesse James, watching the scene of the robbery with intense interest, had failed to notice the approach of the horseman until the latter was close upon the held-up stage.

Though he knew such a shot was fraught with considerable danger to him, from the fact that it would betray too surely his character as a friend to a highwayman, he unhesitatingly sent the shot which wounded the stranger.

Then, putting the spurs to Wingfoot, he rode like the wind toward the exciting scene.

The bold assailant of the Lone Highwayman, who was none other than Thread Kingsley, or King Kingsley, the Crowned Detective, as he was better known, seeing the rapid approach of Jesse James, renewed his hold upon Brazelton, to lift him again from the ground, this time hurling him headforemost into the coach.

But, before Kingsley could follow up his advantage, Brazelton recovered himself enough to bound up, dashing his captor backward with a furious push.

Even then the detective would doubtless have succeeded in re-effecting his capture, had not Hank Smith, awakening from the spell he had seemed to fall under, suddenly whipped up his horses and urged them flying down the road, the shots of Jesse James hurtling about his head.

King Kingsley was in the coach, but his victim had fallen in a heap by the roadside, very much to the former's chagrin.

In vain he tried to stop the terrified driver, and he was borne on toward Acre, an unwilling passenger.

Acre consists, principally, of two streets, running at such angles and crossing each other at the station as to form a huge letter X upon the map.

At the foot of Lissom street stood, from 1877 to 1880, a

one-story wooden building of most unpretentious appearance outside, known as The Shingle.

Within its whitewashed walls gathered, from night to night, some of the very worst characters of Acre, and along with them often came others of wider and worse reputation. Men upon whose heads were fixed prices for their capture—men who were hunted, as wild beasts are tracked down by officers of justice, or those with grievances to settle, or it might be yet others tempted to do what was seldom accomplished for the rewards promised—leaving their rendezvous in the foothills for a few hours amid the bustle and tumult of the crowd.

Thither King Kingsley leisurely made his way, stopping in a dark alley to make such changes in his personal appearance as were possible.

As early as it was in the evening, he found that the patrons of The Shingle had already begun to gather, the place resounding with the coarse jests and unmusical laughter of its visitants.

Entering by a side door, as three or four others were passing in, he carelessly wandered to a seat in an obscure corner, where, under the pretense of reading the day's paper, he could watch the surrounding scene.

He had been an unobserved spectator for an hour, and he was beginning to think he would have his trouble for his pains, as far as finding one of his men, when a newcomer, whose figure was a noticeable one in that congregation of sots, bums and roughs, sauntered into the room.

In an instant a buzz of excitement went around the room, and the players at the different tables suddenly stopped their games.

But no one spoke his name, for to have done that would have been to sign the doom of the speaker, as was well known by past experience.

He was Brent Brazos, the youngest of the three brothers whose names were synonymous with crime.

According to the frontier standard of manly beauty, he was a handsome man of thirty, though dissipation had already set its die upon his features.

He had barely seated himself at an unoccupied table, when a man of taller stature and darker countenance, with a painful limp in his walk, crossed the floor and sank into the seat opposite Brent Brazos.

Had the Crowned Detective known Frank as well by sight as he did Jesse James, he would have recognized the newcomer at once as the older, if not abler, of the terrible twain.

Frank James at once addressed the outlaw, and the two seemed about to engage in a game of cards, when Kingsley felt a light touch on his arm.

Looking up with surprise, he saw a tall, blond-haired man, with a marked swagger in his bearing, bending over him.

"Pardon me, my friend," greeted the other, who was Kars Decatur; "but seeing you here alone, I thought mebbe you'd try a game with me."

King Kingsley would fain have declined, had he thought it policy.

As it was, he simply nodded, as he followed Decatur to a neighboring table.

Confusion was reigning all over the place, so little heed was paid to either of the pair of players mentioned.

"My funds are low, so the stakes must correspond," said Kingsley.

Decatur nodded, as he shuffled the cards, and the playing was begun.

The detective was so seated that he faced Brent Brazos and his fellow-player, and his gaze wandered often in that direction, until Decatur said:

"Do you know them?"

"One."

"The farther one?"

Kingsley nodded.

"The other is Frank James."

At the mention of that name, King Kingsley failed to conceal his surprise; and his companion smiled.

"I am lying in wait for him and his brother, King Kingsley."

Again the detective started, and intuitively glanced around to see if any one had overheard his name.

"Do not be alarmed," Decatur hastened to say, in the same low tone. "I will not betray you, for I need your help in the work I have on hand. I want to see you when this game is over where we can talk. I am Kars Decatur, the mortal enemy of Jesse and Frank James."

Though, like all men in his calling, King Kingsley possessed remarkable self-possession, it was with difficulty he could keep from betraying his wonder that this man, who was an entire stranger, should call him by name and say:

"I am here on the same errand that you are!"

In the course of a few minutes, Frank James left the room, and shortly after Brent Brazos followed him.

"That means something," whispered Decatur. "Foller him."

The detective had already risen to his feet, and as soon as he deemed it prudent he, too, quitted the place.

When he had got outside, however, he looked in vain for the outlaws, who had vanished as if swallowed up by the darkness.

Presently he was joined by Wild Decatur.

"Miss them, do you?" asked the latter. "Well, I know where they are most likely to be found, so follow me and don't let your shadow rustle the leaves."

Then, as silently as specters, the two stole away into the night, the Texan leading the way.

Finally Kingsley began to think there might be some foul play, and he clutched his weapon closely, ready for instant use, should his companion show any signs of treachery.

At last Decatur motioned for the other to stop, while he leaned forward in a listening attitude, at the same time pointing toward a broken-topped cottonwood standing near the edge of the growth.

Toward this the twain stealthily crawled, until the sound of voices was borne faintly to their ears.

Directly Kingsley realized that the speakers were near the tree, but as he looked in vain for a sight of them, he was nonplussed. But for the softly-spoken words, he would have been ready to declare that no one was in the vicinity, save himself and companion.

Then came the utterance, louder and clearer:

"I mean business."

It was the voice of Frank James.

All at once King Kingsley realized that the speaker was within the giant cottonwood, which must be hollow, with the opening on the opposite side.

As if reading his thoughts, Decatur nodded.

Very little was said by the concealed outlaws, and only a word now and then was heard by the acute listeners, but enough for them to know that the James boys had a scheme of robbery on hand in the accomplishment of which they desired the aid of four companions. Frank James was too shrewd to mention the time and place or the booty in view.

Would Brent Brazos lend his assistance upon such terms as should be agreed upon at a meeting of the little brotherhood?

The other unhesitatingly consented, and suggested that his brother Lars would be a good acquisition to the force.

The listeners failed to catch Frank James' reply, and, feeling that the interview must be near a close, they cautiously retreated.

"Now what do you say?" asked Kars Decatur, when they were at a safe distance. "I have shown you enough to show that I have improved the short time I have stayed in Acre. There is one in that gang, Al Streeter, whom I have sworn to kill as I would a peccary. Jesse James has shot me down twice like a dog, but I will show him I have yet another life. I hate Frank James, because he's a brother of the other.

"I won't deny that the fifty thousand dollars reward offered for the James boys has something to do with my intentions. I have had the chances when I could have shot down either of them, but I feared the other would get away. So I want a partner, an' you're the best man I know. But, if you go with me, you must agree to leave the James boys to me. There will be enough for you, then. Will you help me rid the country of the red-handed cusses?"

There was considerably more said before King Kingsley gave his reply, but at its conclusion he had agreed to help bring to justice what was going to prove one of the strongest combinations of desperadoes ever united in one fell purpose.

King Kingsley was a man of iron nerve, keen, cautious, of unflinching courage, who thoroughly understood the fearful risks he was courting, and read the character of his companion like an open book, but believed him to be the one most fitted to his assistance at that time.

Kars Decatur was a hair-brained madman, practically without method in his undertakings, but utterly devoid of fear, and unceasing in his purpose.

Would they succeed in foiling such arch-schemers as Frank and Jesse James?

CHAPTER VIII.

"WE HAVE BEEN BETRAYED."

Jesse James' meeting with Bill Brazelton was highly satisfactory to him.

Though smarting from his recent defeat of the robbery of the stage, the Lone Highwayman gave a willing ear to the other's plans, and, before they separated, he pledged himself to help carry them out.

He the more gladly agreed to the scheme, for the reason that the Hon. John Marchmount was to be the victim.

The latter, through mining and speculations, had accumulated a property running up into the millions, so reports claimed. But, with all his wealth, he was not satisfied with his surroundings, and he had decided to move to New York City.

Accordingly, he had chartered a car to carry his most valued treasures, including a goodly amount of gold bullion and ready cash. He had adopted this way, thinking it would be safer than any other, for it must be known that this proceeding was not without public talk.

The wily speculator had told but one person living of his plans, but, in doing that, he had been overheard by another, who was in the employ of that arch-robber, Jesse James.

The Hon. John Marchmount and his daughter were to go on the same train with the treasure-car—the latter to be under the charge of his agent. At the time of Jesse James' latest information, the day of departure had not been set.

"I will give fifty thousand dollars to any four men who will assist my brother and myself in this game, and we will run our risk to get our parts on what there is in value over that amount."

"You say you have one man," said Brazelton.

"Yes; and a good one, on whom we can count every time."

"You can consider me your fourth, then."

"Give me your hand."

"When will it come off?"

"I think I shall be able to tell you to-morrow evening at this time."

"I will be on hand."

Upon reaching his home, Jesse James found some one there awaiting him.

It was his spy from Astonia, the home of John Marchmount.

"Well, what news to-night?" asked Jesse, who saw by his confederate's countenance that he had an important communication to make.

"He is going to start sooner than I expected."

"When?" was the eager question.

"Thursday evening, on the ten-fifty train."

"From Morris, as was first talked?"

"Yes."

"I am glad it is so soon. I will be ready. Here, Brandy, take this for your information, and may it last you the week out. I shall not need to trouble you more, unless something new turns up. You will keep your eyes open?"

"Cert."

"That will do."

Left alone, Jesse James impatiently waited for the coming of Frank, which was not until past midnight.

His information, however, more than paid for the waiting he had caused, and Jesse quickly agreed that two of the Brazos brothers would afford them all the further assistance they would need.

The men found, all there was left was to perfect their plans, and lay them before their confederates.

It was then Monday evening, or, rather, Tuesday morning, for it was past midnight, and they had three days in which to complete their arrangements.

The James boys had fully determined to leave that part of the country as soon as this affair was over, and, accordingly, made during the next day such arrangements as were necessary to carry out that purpose.

This was of but small importance, however, to the great work in hand.

That evening (Tuesday) Frank met Brent Brazos and arranged to have him, with his brother Lars, be present at a meeting to be held at a place bearing the gruesome name of "Hangman's Hut."

Jesse saw Bill Brazelton, to make a like agreement with the Lone Highwayman, so everything was moving along as it seemed that it should.

Meanwhile, King Kingsley and his ally were not idle.

In some way never known to the detective, the wily Decatur managed to learn of the intended meeting of the six road-agents at Hangman's Hut, when they at once laid a plan, as dangerous as it seemed simple.

Wild Decatur at first scorned the idea of asking for assistance in the capture of the outlaws, but King Kingsley knew the character of the men too well to know that any one of them would be taken alive, unless overpowered by superior numbers. To let even one of the gang escape would destroy the satisfaction of the occasion. So he insisted that they call upon the sheriff of Acre for his assistance, and his companion finally agreed to it.

It was then decided that Kingsley, Decatur and one other, by the name of Halstead, should go to the hut one at a time, so as not to excite suspicion, and lie in wait there for the outlaws, to witness the opening of their meeting, and, in the midst of their intercourse, give the alarm, when the sheriff and his posse would be near to surround the place, and thus cut off all retreat.

Of course, it was expected that the outlaws would fight until the last, but the three in their concealment would have such an advantage as must necessitate the others' defeat, coupled with the sudden appearance of the sheriff and his men.

The watchword selected by the outlaws had been "To the death," and that was to be the shibboleth of King Kingsley and his backers.

Sheriff Tartman promised that he would do his part faithfully, to be on hand at the moment the signal was given.

Frank and Jesse James had asked their confederates to meet them at a quarter to ten on Wednesday evening, and, in order to give no cause for suspicion, King Kingsley was to secrete himself about the place during the afternoon. An hour later, or near it, Halstead was to follow him. Then Wild Decatur was to come immediately after sunset.

To be sure and act in unison, the three were to take positions near to each other, to cover the band of desper-

does at a signal from the detective, the watchword—to the death.

A more fitting place than Hangman's Hut could not have been selected for the tragedy which was to follow.

Some time in the sixties a man by the name of Hiltzman built a small one-story and a half wooden house, about two miles north of the village of Acre. It was a rough-looking structure, and for some unaccountable reason the ridgepole at the west end was allowed to protrude a couple of feet or more beyond the edge of the roof. Little could he have dreamed of the terrible use this projecting timber was to be selected for inside of a year.

Captured with a stolen horse in his keeping it became his gibbet. Soon after this three horse-thieves were captured in that vicinity, and again the projecting ridgepole of the house was utilized for the same use as in the case of poor Hiltzman.

The hut was no longer occupied; in fact, it was a place shunned by nearly all, though the Turners' gang of road-agents made it for a time their occasional stopping-place. They did this to their sorrow at last, for it was there they were finally surprised and overpowered by a posse from Afton, led by Grim Nevers. And here, one after another of the gang were strung up from the fateful ridgepole, until the seven had been sent into eternity.

An hour and a half before sunset on Wednesday afternoon King Kingsley entered the old hut, having made a careful survey of its surroundings. There was one outside door, which opened upon the side facing the south. One small and a large room comprised the lower apartments. At the farther side of the first room a ladder and an aperture in the ceiling showed where the upper part of the building could be reached.

Ascending the rude stairway, the detective gained the unfinished loft, which he found had a window—or rather an opening for one—at either end. Before one of these still swayed in the wind the rope which had given the place its gruesome name.

All these parts and conditions were seen at a glance by the keen-eyed detective, and then, selecting a position where he could command a partial view of the rooms below, he lay down to watch and wait for his companions.

Halstead's hour came and passed without bringing him, and then the sunlight died out of the lonely dwelling and the shadows of night settled about the anxious King Kingsley, without affording any sign of the coming of Wild Decatur.

Had their plans miscarried?

It was too late for him to leave the place, if he would, and so as the time wore tediously on, he remained there in his cramped position, looking and listening for some indications of his companions, until at last he felt it must be the appointed hour of the outlaws.

The moon came up, and, being within one day of its full, shone into the building, lighting it up with its soft, mellow beams, so it was nearly as bright as day, except in the corners where the shadows mingled with the cobwebs and dust.

At last the sound of footsteps could be heard without the hut, and then the form of a man crossed the rotten threshold.

It was Jesse James.

* He glanced sharply about the place, and, as if satisfied with its appearance, he turned to watch the door.

Perhaps he had already caught the sound of footsteps, for as he stood, bent forward in a listening attitude, a second person—Al Streeter—entered the building, saying in a low tone:

"To the death."

Jesse James smiled as he nodded, then turned to look for the next man.

He was not kept waiting long before Bill Brazelton's well-known figure loomed up in the semi-darkness, and in his deep tone he had uttered the grim watchword:

"To the death."

Brent Brazos came next, looking by far too noble for one engaged in such cold-blooded schemes. The watchword spoken by him was in a voice too low for the acute ear of the hiding detective to catch. But Jesse James heard and was satisfied.

By this time other steps awoke the silence of the scene, and then a tall, slouching figure, clad in the costume of a Mexican, the wide belt girthed about his waist fairly bristling with the butts of the arsenal of weapons he carried on his person. His seamed and sun-bronzed countenance, disfigured by a huge black patch over the right eye, was half hidden by the wide-brimmed sombrero surmounting his massive head. He hissed out the three words between his clinched teeth, as he faced the others:

"To the death."

"You came near being late, Lars," said Brent Brazos, to which remark the other made no reply.

All were now present but Frank James, and Jesse began to look anxiously for him.

"What can keep him away?" asked Jesse James, as the cloud on his countenance deepened. "I assure you it must be something unusual. We have attempted no funny business with you."

Al Streeter, who looked ten years older than on the night he had fled from Casas Grande with Juniata Gandara, had no doubt of the James boys' sincerity, but the Brazos brothers very naturally began to show nervousness.

Looking down upon them with his revolvers covering Jesse James and Bill Brazelton, King Kingsley's thoughts would be hard to describe. He, too, feared the continued absence of Frank James boded some serious disarrangement of the whole affair. Just what was the best for him to do was not plain yet.

Jesse James began to disclose the plot on hand, while the uneasiness of his confederates—at least of the Brazos brothers—grew more and more marked.

King Kingsley's heart beat quicker as he learned that John Marchmont was to be the victim of the outlawed gang, and that it was planned to hold up the train upon which he was to be a passenger at a place about ten miles below Acre, and known as the Ox Bow, on account of a big sweep the railroad makes at that point.

Jesse James was describing the parts each man was expected to take in the affair, while overhead the detective was listening to every word without daring to breathe, when all at once the outlaw stopped in his subject, exclaiming:

"Hark! I hear Frank coming!"

Each one held his breath, as he listened for the sounds of footsteps growing plainer each moment.

In an instant it flashed through the mind of King Kingsley that the person approaching was Wild Decatur. It would have been like the wild Texan.

But the illusion was quickly dispelled by the appearance of Frank James in the doorway, with such an expression on his face as sent a thrill through the frame of even Jesse.

In the twinkling of an eye a revolver in either of his hands was pointed at the little knot of amazed plotters, while his voice, with an ominous ring in its tone, rang out, not loud, but clear:

"We have been betrayed! There is a traitor among us!"

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE DEATH!

Exclamations of amazement sprang to the lips of the startled outlaws, followed by a curse from Jesse James, who was the first to make an intelligible utterance.

"Hold!" thundered Frank James; "the first man who moves dies!"

"What do you mean, Frank?" demanded his brother. "Have you lost your senses?"

"I repeat, there is a traitor among us! We——"

"Who?" asked the five, simultaneously.

Never had King Kingsley seen such looks depicted upon the faces of mortal beings as those shown on the crime-marked visages of that little group.

"A traitor among us?" cried Bill Brazelton. "Spot him—show him to me! and I will put a bullet through his heart though it be my own!"

"A traitor!" exclaimed Streeter. "Impossible."

"You are mad, Frank," said Jesse, "or else you are trying us. Come——"

Frank James' gaze had fixed itself on the Brazos brothers so intently that the others turned toward the twain.

Comprehending the terrible meaning of that look, the younger exclaimed:

"I am Brent Brazos, who has come here in good faith, and if there is a traitor here you have sent him! Who doubts my honor lays his life at my feet!"

"Come, Lars, this is no place for us."

A great change had suddenly come over the latter.

Tearing the patch from his eye, straightening his herculean figure to its full height, and flinging the wide-rimmed sombrero from off his head, a form but too well known stood revealed to the spellbound spectators.

"I am Wild Decatur, the man of three lives! Who doubts me must be tested to the death!"

Following the last words, uttered with a rising inflection, he leveled his firearms at Streeter and Jesse James, to pull the triggers simultaneously.

The sharp report of the weapon in his left hand was followed by a piercing cry from Al Streeter, who fell backward to the floor.

The other weapon missed fire, and Jesse James escaped his avenger.

Before Decatur could repeat his attempt both the James boys fired point blank at his stalwart form with deadly aim.

The Texan's revolver was discharged, its bullet cutting away a lock of hair from the temple of the concealed King Kingsley, rather than its intended victim.

The next moment Wild Decatur, swinging his arms wildly in the air, fell forward upon his face.

At that moment the outlaws were startled by a ringing shout outside the old hut, and the tramp of many feet could be heard.

Sheriff Tartman and his posse were on hand.

"The place is surrounded!" exclaimed Frank James, springing into the room to escape his exposed position.

"Stand——" began King Kingsley, covering Jesse James with one of his weapons and Frank with the other, but before he had got beyond the first word he felt the foundation beneath him yield, and the next moment he was precipitated headforemost into the midst of the outlaws!

It was little wonder if the four desperadoes started back with exclamations of terror at this unceremonious act.

Before they recovered from the shock the detective was on his feet.

He had struck almost in the arms of Bill Brazelton, when the two clinched, and then began a life and death struggle.

The Lone Highwayman was a powerful man, and he knew his life was at stake. He had boasted that he would never be taken alive, and the time had come when he must prove his words.

It was light enough for the outlaw's companions to recognize the bold intruder, and as soon as they had recovered their senses enough to do so, they sprang to Brazelton's assistance.

"Don't let King Kingsley get away!" exclaimed Jesse James.

But before they could reach the side of the contestants they tripped over the body of Wild Decatur, and both fell heavily through the door upon the ground outside.

To follow them would be madness to the three in the hut.

"Each man for himself now," said Frank James. "The old house is surrounded by half of Acre."

A few shots had been fired, and the truth of Frank James' words was apparent to his companions.

"The fiend of a detective has got the best of Bill, and he's being handed over to the mob!" declared Brent Brazos. "This is a devil of a go."

"It comes of that infernal fool," said Jesse James, spurning with his foot the body of Wild Decatur. "But I reckon he's dead enough now to give us no more trouble."

"That crowned detective had a finger in the pie," said Brazos. "But I should like to know how——"

"It looks as if they wanted to talk with us," broke in Frank James.

"You can parley with them if you wish, Frank. I would put a bullet into them before I would waste my breath."

"A few minutes of delay may help us just now. Look the field over, Jess, while I keep their attention in front."

Then, while Frank James talked with Sheriff Tartman, Jesse and Brent Brazos began to examine more closely their surroundings.

In this search Jesse James ascended the swaying ladder to the unfinished chamber.

Brent Brazos followed him, and, while the first went to the window in the east end of the building, he hastened to the opposite one.

Looking out upon the narrow clearing in front of the place, he could see near the edge of the growth the half-concealed figures of their enemies as far as he could look either way.

Just then something struck his hand, causing him to spring back with a low cry.

He saw the next moment it was only the dangling rope of the lynchmen as they had left it. It sent a chill through his frame, as he thought it might next encircle his neck.

"Never!"

He spoke the word unconsciously, so that it reached the ears of his companion, causing him to turn abruptly toward him.

"They are all around us," said the latter. "Have you any choice in regard to how you die?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply. "If die it must be, it shall be in an attempt to escape. I will never surrender."

"Good for you. Let's go below."

Frank James was still holding a consultation with Sheriff Tartman, who should have known it was a waste of breath.

"Hold them till I tell you to let up," said Jesse; "but when I give the word flee to the west window for your life. I will call the crowd to the other end."

"Here, Brazos, give me a lift."

Jesse James had already caught up the unconscious form of Wild Decatur, and with the help of his companion, carried the body up the ladder.

"Now for the east window."

Beginning to divine his companion's intentions, Brent Brazos willingly renewed his hold upon the body, when they quickly bore it to the designated spot.

"Give them your parting shot, Frank!" called out Jesse, in a tone barely loud enough to be heard by his brother. "Then look out for yourself. We will do the same."

"I promise you all the fairness of the courts," Sheriff Tartman was saying.

"Away with such foolishness. Think you I do not know the rabble around you better. If it is life to us we save it with no thanks to you or your mob; if it is death, then we die as freemen."

"And this is your final answer?"

"To-night and forever!"

A moment after the defiant words had rung out with a sharpness heard by all, the figure of a man suddenly appeared at the window facing the sheriff and his immediate followers.

Hardly able to realize that the desperadoes were running into their very grasp, the leader signaled silence to his men, while they waited for the doomed men to get fairly out of the building, when they would riddle them with lead.

Faster and faster the man came through the aperture, until his entire length was in sight.

At that critical moment some one from the crowd shouted:

"Here they come—out of the east window!"

The instant after a volley of bullets filled the body of Wild Decatur, which dropped to the ground with a dull thud.

Then the excited crowd rushed to the place from every direction, tumbling over each other and losing the last mite of judgment they may have possessed.

"The coast is clear!" cried Jesse James, to his companions. "Flee for your lives."

Frank James had already reached the top of the ladder, and he was the first to gain the window.

Then, as he caught hold of the dangling rope by which to lower himself to the ground, he uttered one of his peculiar calls to his faithful Queen, which, with Wingfoot, he had left in the hollow a short distance from the hut, when coming to warn his friends.

By the time he had descended to the ground the ever-willing creature dashed to the place, her mate beside her.

By the time Jesse had dropped to the earth, Frank had swung himself into the saddle.

"Away, Queen!" he urged, when the fleet-footed mare shot across the clearing like a swiftly-moving shadow.

"Jump up here behind me, Brazos," said Jesse James, as he leaped into the saddle of his magnificent bay.

A groan reached his ears, and, looking up, he was amazed to see his companion swaying in the air, without descending a foot, notwithstanding his violent struggles.

"Here they go!" cried one of the posse, catching sight of the fleeing Frank James.

Jesse, unable to understand the delay of Brent Brazos in coming, could not dally for him.

Already the shots of his pursuers were whistling about his head, and with a last look at the dangling figure of Brazos, he gave Wingfoot the freedom of the bit.

As the redoubtable outlaw went out of sight, he turned in his seat to send a parting shot into the midst of the pursuing mob.

CHAPTER X.

JESSE JAMES ON HIS METTLE.

King Kingsley, in his struggle with Bill Brazelton, though getting the best of the outlaw at last, was wounded in the desperate encounter.

He didn't mind that, however, in his satisfaction in knowing the desperado was a prisoner. But not until he had seen him securely bound did he give his attention to the capture of the others.

By that time Frank James had finished his parley with the sheriff, and the latter was giving his order to begin an attack upon the hut.

The detective was one of the first to understand the ruse played by the James brothers, and he was foremost among their pursuers.

Not many of the men from Acre had horses nearer than the "city," so the escape of the fugitives seemed assured from the first.

Though those most wanted had escaped, it was, and is to this day, considered the best night's work ever done in Acre.

Four of the six outlaws had been killed or captured. Streeter was found insensible where the shot of Wild

Decatur had felled him. But he showed signs of life, and soon after his capture regained consciousness.

Brent Brazos, most singular to say, was found hanging from the fatal rope with his neck broken. It was supposed that somehow in his haste to escape he had become entangled in the line, and thus met his untimely fate.

Wild Decatur had, been disfigured almost beyond recognition. At last his eventful career was ended beyond peradventure.

In passing, it is perhaps as well to say that on his way to keep his agreement with King Kingsley at the Hangman's Hut, he had met and killed Lars Brazos.

Immediately he conceived the idea of personating the other and joining the gang at their meeting-place.

With what result we have seen. In some way Frank James learned something was wrong and rushed to the rescue of his friends.

The fate of Kars Decatur, by those who knew him best, was considered a benefit to civilization. He rests in a grave near Brent Brazos, and the two within the shades of that most ill-favored spot, Hangman's Hut.

Halstead, it should be mentioned, at the last moment failed in courage to keep his agreement with King Kingsley, which explains his non-appearance.

Now to follow the fortunes of the James boys.

Almost at the first of their fight, they became separated and did not succeed in getting together.

As soon as he had outdistanced his pursuers so that he felt he had little or nothing more to fear from them, Jesse shaped his course toward the Wooton cabin.

A harsh, vindictive look had come over his features, and often as he glanced around him with the look of a hunted man, some bitter expression left his lips.

"Curse that King Kingsley!" he repeated several times. "I owe this much to him. His life shall pay for his night's work or the worst shall be mine."

Thinking such thoughts as these he came in sight of his temporary home, to discover some one about the place.

Naturally enough, he imagined it to be one of his enemies, but his tool, Brandith, soon made himself known.

"Well, what brings you here?" asked the hunted outlaw, vaguely anticipating what was coming.

"Marchmount has changed his mind and he goes on tonight's train—"

"What!"

"I think it was done as a blind. I came to you as soon as I—"

"When did the train leave Morris?"

"Half an hour ago."

"If on time."

"Which it seldom is."

"Ha! when does it get to Ardela?"

"Three-quarters of an hour after leaving Morris."

"It will be due in Ardela in fifteen minutes," said Jesse James, consulting his watch. "More than likely they will be fifteen minutes behind time. It is seven miles to the place. You can make it, Wingfoot, in thirty minutes. You must and shall!"

"You may think you have thwarted me, John Marchmount and King Kingsley, but I will show you to-night that Jesse James is never beaten!"

So terrific looked the desperate man that the cowardly wretch, Brandith, shrank back with a cry of terror.

"I have told you all, sir," he said. "Good-night."

"All!" repeated the terrible horseman; "then I am done with you!" and he struck the other senseless at his feet. "Dead men tell no tales!"

Jesse James then hastily wrote a message to his brother in a cipher understood by the other that he was going to hold up the midnight express which was coming that evening, instead of the next.

When this was done, he headed Wingfoot toward Ardela, saying:

"Now, by boy, show me of what you are made. We must get to Ardela before that train if it costs your life."

Jesse James knew he could not go the other way without being intercepted at Acre. His only course was in that direction.

As Jesse James reached the bend in the road beyond Wooton cottage, something prompted him to turn in his seat, and waving his hand backward, he said:

"Farewell, old homestead, forever farewell!"

He had not disappeared fairly in the distance before the clatter of hoofs in the opposite direction told of the approach of another horseman.

It was Frank James!

He was unusually excited, and Queen showed that she had been hard driven.

"I have missed him!" panted the outlaw.

Then, springing to the ground, he saw and recognized the hoofprints of his brother's horse.

A moment later he held in his hand the other's missive.

Hastily scanning the bit of paper, he exclaimed:

"Jesse is wild! He will run his neck into the halter before this business is over, or I am crazy."

Remounting his horse, Frank James headed the creature toward Ardela and rode after Jesse like the wind.

King Kingsley had wisely judged that the James boys would seek their stopping-place, if not at once, before morning.

Accordingly as soon as he could get a horse, he started toward the Wooton dwelling, accompanied by half-a-dozen companions.

Brandith was sitting up and rubbing his swollen head as the detective rode up.

"Spare me!" he exclaimed, at sight of the newcomers.

"They have gone to hold up the train at Ardela."

"Seize the wretch!" commanded Kingsley. "We are in luck."

A promise that he should not be harmed if he told the truth in full of all he knew about the James boys, caused Brandith to disclose their entire plot to capture the valuables belonging to the Hon. John Marchmount.

"It is barely possible they will reach Ardela in season to board the train at that place," declared King Kingsley, consulting his watch. "How can we thwart them? I see but one course. I must go back to Acre and telegraph to Ardela the situation. Look after the prisoner, men."

Without further delay King Kingsley wheeled his horse and dashed back to Acre with all speed possible.

Reaching the station, he sprang from the saddle and up the steps into the building.

"Quick!" he cried to the telegraph operator, "give me Ardela. I have an important message to send."

"Can't do it!" replied the operator. "I have just tried, but I can't reach it. Communication has been cut off."

"It is the work of that scoundrel, Jesse James!" exclaimed the detective, as he realized that he had been foiled. "He will accomplish his purpose."

About four miles above Acre the road to Ardela, followed by Jesse James, crosses the railroad track, and after that for three or four miles runs parallel with the latter. Upon reaching this place the cunning brain of the desperate train robber conceived the idea of cutting the telegraph wires and thus avoiding any extra risk to himself in case his intentions should become known at Acre.

This work delayed him but a brief while, when, returning to his saddle, he urged Wingfoot on, on, faster and faster, until the gallant steed, catching the wild exhilaration of the race, flew over the ground as only he could fly.

At last, when the few remaining lights in Ardela glimmered in the distance and the sharp whistle of the train came up from the valley beyond, he exclaimed, under his breath:

"I shall be in season! Who outwits Jesse James must ride the lightning!"

The midnight express, as it had been named at El Paso, in charge of Conductor Steerway, pulled into Ardela sixteen minutes late. The train consisted of two coaches, an express car, a combination mail and baggage-car, and the Marchmount special.

As it was nothing unusual for him to be late at this part of his trip, Conductor Steerway's rubicund face wore its usual smile when he swung his lantern after the allotted time for stopping had elapsed and shouted:

"All aboard!"

Unnoticed by him, a horseman dismounted from a foam-flecked steed on the opposite side of the train, and just as the engine wheels began to revolve, swung himself upon the car steps.

Jesse James had won so far!

He had gained the front end of the forward coach, Conductor Steerway having stepped aboard at the other end of the same car.

Wingfoot, left to shift for himself, saw the train bearing his master steam away, and, shaking his foam-dappled body, started back on the same road he had come.

When he had recovered from his recent exertions, and realized that so far he had accomplished his purpose, Jesse James prepared for the desperate undertaking he had volunteered to carry out.

He felt that the sooner the work was begun the better would be his chance of success. No one else had taken the train at Ardela, and the conductor had sunk into a seat near the farther door to count up his fares, and to make the proper entries in his book.

Looking down the length of the car, Jesse James was disappointed not to see Mr. Marchmount and his daughter. Perhaps they were in the rear car. What if Brandith had been mistaken, and they were not going on this train?

The thought maddened him, but he would soon know the truth.

To avoid communication between the conductor and engineer, he was careful to cut the cord running from car to car, and connecting with the engine.

This done, he looked to his weapons, and with a cocked revolver in either hand, he flung open the car door, crying in a ringing tone, heard plainly above the rattle and roar of the train:

"Throw up your hands, all of you! I am running this train!"

Women shrieked and men turned pale at the unexpected sight of the armed stranger threatening their lives.

"Obey or take the consequences," thundered the desperado.

"We obey!" exclaimed the conductor, throwing up his hands. "Spare our lives."

The passengers imitated the example of the conductor, and the single foeman was master of the situation.

"Bring forward your valuables and lay them at my feet. Come one by one, beginning with this seat here. Be lively, for my time is precious!"

It seemed like the desperate personation of child's play but, one by one, as the terrible outlaw commanded, the men and women brought such treasures, money, jewels and whatnots as they possessed to him, until even Conductor Steerway had paid his tribute. Human lives are prized above worldly pelf.

When the last person had rendered his tribute, Jesse James, without relaxing his vigilance, scraped together the property and backed out of the car.

"Make any outcry and I will shoot the nearest person!"

The next moment he had uncoupled the train and left the coaches helpless upon the track!

"Now for the Marchmount special!" he muttered.

Not one of the three had heard the cat-like steps of the approaching road-agent, but looking up with terror at the sound of that ominous warning, they beheld Jesse James within a few feet of them with a revolver leveled at the heads of Mr. Marchmount and Mr. Forbes, the agent.

Flora Marchmount suppressed the scream which rose to her lips, while she stood transfixed.

With little respect for their feelings the outlaw proceeded to bind and gag the three, treating Flora with no better consideration than the others.

"There, that makes it certain. Now, John Marchmount, I will go to finish my work."

Of course the train had been forging its way ahead all of the time, and when Jesse James left the special car to enter the express, he found that they had reached the edge of the long stretch of forest lying between Ardela and Acre.

Like a cat stealing upon its prey, he crept into the mail and express car.

The mail agent was dozing on his stool, when suddenly he was dealt a furious blow on the side of the head, which toppled him to the floor without so much as a groan.

The noise of the moving train drowning the sound of his fall, the arch-slayer peered cautiously into the adjoining compartment.

The express agent was chatting volubly with two companions.

"I tell you no single man could get into this car and overpower we three, Bill Brazelton's boast to the contrary."

"The trouble is, Dick, they take a feller unawares and don't give him any show."

"That's all in your eye. No man who has his wits about him need to be taken off his guard."

"I will see about that, young man!" exclaimed a deep, hoarse voice near at hand, and turning the three were amazed to find the muzzles of Jesse James' firearms staring them in the face.

"Hands up—every man of you!"

"Mur——"

Up went the hands of the express agent with his sentence unfinished, the others following his example in a way more hasty than they realized.

"We're gon—— Oh, Mister Robber——"

"That isn't my name, sir. I am Jesse James!"

"The Lord save us! Excuse me, Mister James, I didn't mean to call you by the wrong name."

"What was that you were saying about one man not being capable of holding up a train where you were?"

"I was mistaken, Mr. James. I—I hope you will excuse——"

"Down upon your knees!"

The agent obeyed.

"The rest of you!"

The others lost no time in obeying.

"Now I am going to tie you like a parcel of calves that you are. Be careful——"

"You don't——"

Quick as lightning the arm of Jesse James shot out, sending the speaker senseless to the floor.

"I am not sure but that is the best way," he said. "It would save me considerable time."

The teeth of the agent were chattering and he shook in every limb as his captor bound and gagged him.

Then the other was served in the same way.

"Once more and my triumph is complete," said Jesse James, as he cast a last look to his captives.

Stealthily leaving the car he looked out over the tender to see the engineer and his fireman at their posts.

The first, with his hand on the reversing lever, stood peering out into the pale light falling across the track with a bewildering glimmer.

His helper was busily shoveling the coal into the capacious firebox, thinking of the home toward which he was being borne at the rate of forty miles an hour. Suddenly a piece of coal was dislodged and fell at his feet, causing him to look up, when his gaze met the gleaming muzzles of a pair of revolvers within three feet of his head!

"Heavens! I——"

"Shut your mouth!" thundered Jesse James. "Obey me or you are dead men."

Engineer Dawson's hand released its hold upon the lever, but it stopped short in its passage to the firearm he carried belted to his side. There was a power in those deadly tubes he dared not defy.

"Every man back of here is bound and gagged, and if either of you so much as lift a finger, I will send a bullet through your heart. Understand?"

"Yes," replied the twain, in the same breath.

"And you will obey me?"

"We will."

"Then see that you keep this train going. Make it fly, for you have no load to pull. I shall have my eye upon you to see that you do your best."

Whether they would or not, the two men resumed their duties, and in a moment the engine was rushing on its ironbound course with lightning-like velocity.

Jesse James knew they were about two miles and a half above Acre, and his idea was to keep on until going something like twenty miles below the "city" to a place where he could stop the train and take care of his booty without particular danger to himself.

He anticipated no trouble in running the gantlet at Acre, as the train had the right of way, and before any one there could discover anything wrong about it, he would be miles beyond and snapping his fingers at whoever should dare to pursue.

In the midst of this chain of triumphant thoughts, his gaze fixed as intently as ever on his captive workmen, suddenly the train, without the least warning, came to an abrupt stop.

The engine panted and the wheels spun round with a loud whirr, but scarcely a foot was gained.

"More steam!" thundered the amazed outlaw. "Keep it going or I will shoot you like a——"

"I can't," gasped the terrified engineer. "The wheels don't bite the iron!"

"What's to pay? Start——"

"Hands up, Jesse James! or you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

No sooner had King Kingsley discovered that the wires between Acre and Ardela had been tampered with than his active brain began to contrive some way to defeat the daring outlaw in his wild project.

"Follow me, Tartman," he cried to the sheriff. "Let's ride up as far as Henderson's anyway. The train will probably be attacked before it gets there, but we may be in season to do something."

A minute later the detective, with the sheriff beside him and a score of mounted men beside them, dashed out of Acre, to take the road following up the valley and on toward Ardela.

"Henderson's Switch," as the small way station was called at the place now known as Whitby, is about two miles above Acre.

But Kingsley and his companions were not more than ten minutes in gaining the place.

Henderson was just closing his small store for the night as the horsemen dashed up.

"What in thunder is up?" he asked, in amazement. "Anything wrong?"

"Seen anything of Jesse James to-night?" demanded the sheriff.

"Jesse James! is he in these parts?"

"Hark!" exclaimed King Kingsley. "I can hear the train coming! That means that he has missed her."

"And there is nothing more for us to do," said the officer, in what seemed a tone of relief.

"There it comes around Break-Neck Bend!" cried one of the others.

About Whitby the track makes almost a huge semicircle in climbing the long up-grade, so that the track is plainly seen at the station for three miles, looking by daylight like a gigantic serpent coiled around the mountain side.

"Isn't Nate just crowding her right along!" exclaimed Henderson.

"The train isn't all there!" said Kingsley, who had seen what the rest had overlooked. "It has broken apart—no, by heavens! I see it!"

"What?" chorused his companions. "Jesse——"

"It is his work! he has captured the train, let loose the coaches, and is escaping with the rest!"

The exciting explanation brought cries of surprise from his hearers.

"What shall we do? What can we do?" asked the startled sheriff.

King Kingsley's thoughts ran rapidly in the next moment.

Must they stand idle there and let the notorious outlaw run through their fingers?

It looked like it.

Glancing around the place, Kingsley saw a barrel of lard standing near the store door.

The sight of that was an inspiration to him.

"Quick! lend a hand with me!" and seizing a pail, he began to fill it with the soft grease.

Without stopping to ask him what were his intentions, Sheriff Tartman and half-a-dozen others followed the detective's example.

As soon as the latter had filled his bucket, he ran down the railroad a short distance, when he began to grease the tracks as if his life was depending upon his exertions.

Many hands make light work, and though the train was approaching at the rate of almost a mile a minute, sufficient of the lard had been daubed on the rails to stop the engine as we have seen.

King Kingsley was alongside the cab by the time the train had come to a standstill, and leveling his deadly sixshooters at the heart of the amazed outlaw, he had exclaimed:

"Hands up, Jesse James! or you are a dead man!"

Sheriff Tartman and a dozen others thronged to the detective's assistance, and for a moment it looked as if it was all over with Jesse James.

But he had an unlooked-for rescuer at hand.

Frank James, upon leaving the Wooton house to follow his brother, soon found that it was folly for him to pursue such a course.

He most certainly could not get to Ardela in season to help Jesse.

If he had any doubt of that he overcame it, and instead of keeping on toward Ardela he started back in the direction of Acre, with no fixed purpose in his mind.

As has been said, the road ran nearly parallel with the track for a considerable part of the way.

Thus he was in sight of Henderson's Switch and witnessed at a short distance away the greasing of the rails.

Anticipating what was coming, he spurred Queen forward to the place as the train stopped, and as King Kingsley's victorious command rang out he rushed like a whirlwind upon him.

Half a dozen of the men were hurled to the ground, the sheriff among them, and dealing the detective a terrific blow, he checked his horse's mad gait, shouting:

"Mount behind me, Jess! It's a ride for life."

The stopping of the engine, the holdup of King Kingsley, the appearance of the crowd, of Frank, had come so suddenly that Jesse James was for the moment dazed.

Must he give up his prize at the moment when he had it in his grasp?

"Quick! for your life, Jess!"

It was his only chance.

The next instant he was seated behind Frank, to be carried swiftly from the scene, though not until he had emptied his firearms into the midst of his enemies.

A futile chase was given the fleeing outlaw, and then the pursuers returned to the place which had come so near being the scene of triumph.

King Kingsley's worse wound was the thought that he had let the notorious desperado escape him after all. But Mr. Marchmont and the beautiful Flora were saved, and with her praise ringing in his ears he forgot his disappointment in that other direction.

When the excitement had died away somewhat the James boys reappeared in that vicinity long enough to gather up the hidden treasures they had brought from Mexico, which with the money and jewelry Jesse had obtained the night of his holdup, was not a small pile. With it they started for their home in St. Joseph.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 40) will contain "Jesse James' Ruse; or, The Escape from Lame Horse Settlement."

EXCHANGE COLUMN.

(Notice.—This column is free to all our readers, but we cannot be responsible for transactions made through it. All offers must be strictly exchange offers, and no "for sale" advertisements, or exchanges of explosives, or worthless articles will be printed. Address all communications for this column to "Exchange Column.")

Harvey Harris, Box 155, East Haddon, Conn., will exchange a 3 1-2x3 1-2 camera for a bracket saw with foot power or the best offer. He also has a magic lantern and views for which he awaits offers.

The R. V. Perine Exchange Bureau, No. 7997 Jeanette St., New Orleans, La., has volumes of boys' papers, about one thousand 5 and 10-cent libraries and novels to exchange. Especially wants copies of the Shield Weekly and a few numbers of the Diamond Dick, Jr., Weekly, and the Nick Carter Weekly, and any numbers of the old Diamond Dick, Medal 10 cents, and New York Five-Cent libraries. Send full list and receive ours.

DEEDS OF FAMOUS MEN.

This week ends the "Deeds of Famous Men Contest." The editor has whole stacks of good stories on his desk, and is working hard to decide which are the best. He will let you know the names of the Prize Winners in three weeks.

In the meantime, keep your eyes open for next week's JESSE JAMES WEEKLY. There will be an announcement of a Contest there that will make you strip off your coat and buckle down to work in earnest.

The Hero of Fort Moultrie.

(By Roy L. Townsend, Me.)

On June 1, 1776, news was brought to Charleston, S. C., that the British fleet of sail were some twenty miles north of the bar. Work had been pushed vigorously on the defenses, and especially at Sullivan's Island, where a fort of palmetto logs was built and manned under the direction and command of William Moultrie. Continental troops arrived from the north. Also came General Charles Lee, to whom great deference was paid on account of his rank in the Continental Army, and still more because he was an Englishman. He made an early visit to Sullivan's Island, pronounced the fort useless and advised its abandonment.

Moultrie, a man of few words, replied that he thought he could hold the fort. Lee took the British view that British soldiers were invincible. Being unable to bring about the abandonment of the island, he withdrew some of the troops and then devoted himself to urging Moultrie to build a bridge to retreat over.

Moultrie, however, had come to fight, not retreat, and he went on building his fort, and paid little attention to the matter of the bridge. A month elapsed before Admiral Parker of the British fleet attacked, but he at last bore down toward the fort on June 28th. The attack began about ten o'clock in the morning. The palmetto boys stood the shots admirably, for the balls sank into the wood, which neither broke nor splintered, and when the long, hot day drew to a close, Admiral Parker withdrew his fleet. Altogether, the British lost two hundred and five men killed and wounded, and one man-of-war. The Americans lost eleven men killed, and had twenty-six wounded. It was a very well-fought action, and the honor of the day belonged to Moultrie, whose calm courage and excellent disposition enabled him to hold the fort and beat off the enemy.

It was during this engagement that Sergeant William Jasper performed a daring feat. At the commencement of the action, the flagstaff was cut away by a ball from a British ship, and the Crescent flag of South Carolina fell outside upon the beach. Jasper leaped the parapet, walked the length of the fort, picked up the flag, fastened it upon a sponge staff, and in the midst of the iron hail pouring upon the fortress, and in sight of the whole fleet, fixed the flag firmly upon the bastion. Cheers greeted him as he ascended the parapet and leaped,

unhurt, within the fort. On the day after the battle, Governor Rutledge rewarded Jasper for his valor by presenting him with his own handsome small sword, and thanked him in the name of his country. He offered him a lieutenant's commission, but our hero, who could neither read nor write, modestly refused it, saying, "I am not fit to keep officers' company, I am but a sergeant."

George Dewey.

(By Arthur Heideske, Chicago, Ill.)

George Dewey, who will go down to history as executor of the first great stroke of the war with Spain, was born in Montpelier, Vermont, December 26, 1837. His father was Dr. Julius Y. Dewey. At the age of seventeen, after a preparatory course in the Northfield Military School, Dewey was appointed a cadet at Annapolis in the class which graduated in 1858. When the Civil War broke out he was appointed a lieutenant and assigned to the Mississippi, a seventeen-gun steam sloop under Commander Melancthon Smith. His first taste of war was in 1862, when the West Gulf squadron forced a passage up the Mississippi River ahead of Farragut.

Dewey's great victory at Manila was one of the greatest victories of the American-Spanish war. Commodore Dewey attacked Cavite on Sunday morning, May 1, 1898.

Dewey arrived Saturday night off Manila Bay and decided to enter it at once.

With all its lights out, the squadron steamed into the bay with their crews at the guns. The squadron was in this order: The flagship Olympia, the Baltimore, the Raleigh, the Petrel, the Concord and the Boston.

At eight o'clock the flagship passed Corredigor Island without a sign being given that the Spaniards were aware of its approach.

Some one cried, "Remember the Maine!" and it was taken up by every man on board the ships.

The Olympia was now ready to fight. Dewey and his officers were on the forward bridge. "You may fire when ready, Gridley," said Dewey.

"Capture or destroy the fleet!" were Dewey's orders, and they were carried out.

The Americans did not lose one man.

Daniel Webster.

(By Robert C. Norton, N. B.)

Daniel Webster, an American statesman, was born in Salisbury, now Franklin, N. H., January 18, 1782. He was the second son of Ebenezer Webster and his second wife, Abigail Eastman. He entered Exeter Academy in 1796, and in 1801 graduated at Dartmouth College with the foremost position in his class. He finished his law studies in the office of Christopher Gove, in Boston, and was admitted to the bar in the spring of 1805.

He took part in politics as a Federalist, was elected to Congress in 1812, and on June 10th delivered his maiden speech, which took the house and country by surprise. He was re-elected in 1814 and in 1816 removed to Boston. On December 22, 1820, he pronounced his celebrated discourse at Plymouth on the anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers. The most celebrated of his Parliamentary speeches was made on January 26 and 27, 1830. In the spring of 1837 he made a hasty tour in England, Scotland and France.

In the spring of 1843 he retired to private life. In 1845 he again took his seat in the Senate. Mr. Webster delivered a speech on the 7th of March, 1850, in which he counseled abandonment of the Wilmot proviso and justified the fugitive slave law. In the reorganization of the cabinet by President Fillmore after the death of Taylor in 1850 Mr. Webster was called to the Department of State. His friends expected his nomination to the Presidency, but the choice fell on General Scott for the Whig party. Early in May Mr. Webster was thrown from his carriage near his farm in Marshfield, where he spent the closing months of the years of his life.

Captain John Smith.

(By Michael L. Mooney, Mass.)

John Smith, the founder of Virginia, was born in 1579, in Lincolnshire, England, in a town called Wiltoughby.

When a boy of 18 he became so adventurous and daring that he sold his books and other things so as to go to sea. The death of his father at that time prevented him from doing so. His guardians proved unfaithful, and knowing his desire for adventure secretly approved of it.

They apprenticed him out with a merchant in Lynn. He did not like this kind of work, and ran away to France, became a soldier in the English army at that time acting as auxiliary against Spain in the Netherlands.

After fighting there some time, he thought he would return to his home. He was then nineteen years old.

The ship he was on was wrecked, but he was saved. He then was overtaken by sickness on the Isle of Northumberland.

After recovering he had many strange adventures. He had been captured by Barbary pirates, left for dead on a battlefield in Hungary, and sold into slavery in Turkey, but made his way home in time to come to Virginia.

Here his strange adventures seemed to follow him.

He was captured by the Indians, and they were on the point of knocking him on the head when a young squaw, named Pocahontas, daughter of the head war chief, threw her arms about him and saved his life.

As the colony wanted food, Smith coaxed or bullied the Indians until they gave it to the colony.

So this way two years passed, and had Smith not ruled the colony they would have broken out in mutiny.

At last provisions came and Smith, disabled by an accident, returned home.

Life of Davy Crockett.

(By Charlie Puetzman, Mo.)

Davy Crockett was born on the 17th of August, 1786, in a small cabin located in the wilderness of east Tennessee, then a part of Virginia, at the mouth of Lime Creek, where it debouches into the Nolachucky River, and in what is now Washington County.

At the age of twelve years young Davy was hired by his father to a German cattle dealer named Siler, who treated him with some kindness, and with whom he remained for six weeks, when he ran away and joined a teamster who was en route for Knoxville.

After a week of hardships, he abandoned that and returned home.

Being a likely boy with plenty of pluck and resolution, on the same day he found employment with a drover named Cheek, with whom he traveled to Fort Royalin, North Carolina.

Receiving about seven dollars from the drover for his services, Davy drifted about in the east for some time working at odd jobs until he found himself at Baltimore. Here he engaged to take a voyage to London on a sailing vessel, but was prevented by the wagoner, who had his clothes and who wanted him to drive a load of flour to Winchester.

But Davy soon gave the wagoner the slip and started west on foot.

Davy soon returned home and his father made a proposition to him that if Davy would agree to work off a debt of thirty-six dollars which Mr. Crockett owed a man by the name of Mr. Wilson, he would set him free. This offer was immediately accepted.

Having won his freedom Davy worked six months for another one of his father's creditors.

During this service Davy fell violently in love with a lass of the neighborhood, and after courting her for a while he asked her to be his wife.

She consented, and they set the day for the wedding, but as the day approached the fickle girl backed out and married another man who had long been her suitor. They were not courteous enough to ask Davy to the wedding.

After hugging this disappointment to his badly wounded heart for several weeks Davy started out to hunt for another wife, and, being a natural born hunter, he was not long in finding a repository for his affections in a niece of a Quaker school master, and became engaged a second time, but, sad to relate, he was again jilted at the very hour he thought his happiness complete.

But at last Davy was married, and went West, where he enlisted in the army, and had many thrilling fights and escapes.

He soon started home and the triumphal tour was ended at Louisville, for he made no more stops until he reached the shore of Tennessee at Mills Point, where

he was met by his son William and in a wagon started home thirty-five miles distant. Davy Crockett was a brave man and a great hunter.

Gallant Major-General Custer.

(By George Lordlin, Minn.)

George Armstrong Custer was a true American from his birth to his tragic death—brave, patriotic and honest. At school, on the farm, as a teacher, and as a cadet and a soldier he was ever the same.

As a West Point cadet he was not, we must admit, a model student. He kept up with his class, to be sure, but much of his time was spent enjoying himself with boon companions, although never doing anything dishonorable; he was an American boy, you know.

At graduation time he got into trouble. Custer was officer of the day at the time and supposed to keep order. Late in the day two cadets quarreled and came to blows. Forgetting his duty, love of fair play overmastering him, he pushed back the crowd, crying:

"Stand back, boys, let's have a fair fight." He was all but expelled for this. Two days after his graduation he was at General Scott's quarters, ready to enter the field. Having the option he chose active service in preference to drilling recruits.

Next day he was under fire at Bull Run, and not yet twenty-two.

Shortly after this by bravery in the "Seven Days'

Fight" he gained a promotion at the hands of General McClellan.

At the battle of Aldie, Custer especially distinguished himself. At the word "Charge!" he dashed out in front crying, "Come on, boys; follow me!" and they followed. For this bravery he was made Brigadier-General, U. S. V.

Throughout the entire war he was recognized as a very daring and cool-headed officer.

All Custer's campaigns against the Southern Indians are marked by his bravery, honesty and sagacity.

In the famous Bellknap impeachment case Custer, forced to be a witness, and knowing that he would gain powerful enemies, told all he knew about the case. Was not this the act of an honorable man? He gained political enemies, who had him removed from his command.

When his army was requested to move against hostile Indians without him, Custer begged to be allowed to accompany them, not as a commander, but as a companion to share the hardships of the men he loved.

To quote his own words.

"I appeal to you as a soldier, to spare me the humiliation of seeing my regiment march to meet the enemy and not to share in its dangers."

Are not these the words of a patriotic man, caring more for his country than himself?

I must pass over his tragic but glorious death, and, in conclusion, will say that any true American would gladly accept such a fate if he had a history like that of gallant Custer—the American.

TALES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING.

HUNTING THE AMERICAN LION.

By DR. J. G. BETHUNE.

Every youth has read and been told that the lion is the king of beasts. The Dark Continent is his chosen home, and over its burning plains and in the depths of its pestilential jungles he roams a monarch in the animal kingdom, and with no fear of the daring hunter who follows him into his almost impenetrable recesses.

There can be no question that a full-grown lion, in the prime of his mighty strength and dauntless courage, is a terrible creature. Many a time has he advanced into the circle of light thrown out by the campfire, and seizing a man with his massive jaws, galloped off with him, in the face of the cries and shots of his terrified comrades. Retiring to the gloom from which he emerged, he has sat down and crunched his supper at his leisure, ready to return and seize another victim whenever impelled to do so by the pangs of hunger.

And yet, formidable as is the African lion, he has no right to the title of the king of beasts. Other wild animals are stronger and braver than he. The wild boar of India will give no creature the path; and, backing against a rock, he will defy not one but two or three leopards, who dare not attack him. Even the famishing tiger will not assail the wild boar unless he sees the

chance to do so treacherously; for those fearful tusks are like a couple of broadswords, driven by the muscles of a Hercules.

The tiger himself is the superior in every respect of the lion. He is more active, courageous, daring and powerful. Scientific tests have proven that his strength is one-fifth greater than the lion's, while, in other respects he is immeasurably his superior. The tiger is unknown in Africa, his chosen home being the continent of Asia, and especially India, which is the paradise of the fiercest wild animals and the most venomous reptiles. The loss of life in Hindostan from these pests is more than twenty thousand annually.

Now, all of us, as Americans, are patriotic and proud of our country. We are certain that its people, its productions, its climate, and its resources are without a rival in the world. When we, therefore, lay claim to the possession of lions, native to the soil, we are going to insist upon it, in the face of every argument; but, all the same, we must admit that the American lion, though a creature to be dreaded and hunted with care, is not to be considered alongside of his African brother.

This animal is peculiar to the Southwest. We never meet him in the Northern sections, nor, indeed, in the

Southern and Western States, except in the portions I have named. He is a lithe, powerful and active creature, whose depredations among the cattle of the ranchmen render him an object of detestation. When driven into a corner, he will fight desperately, and, indeed, any creature will, and more than one man has paid dearly for holding him too cheaply.

For several weeks the ranchers and stockmen along the Pit River were annoyed by these beasts, which, in the section, are known as California lions. Upon visiting their herds of goats, sheep, hogs and cattle, they found that serious inroads had been made upon them. Few of the full-grown cattle suffered, but the destruction among the calves caused not only annoyance but grave alarm.

Unless some check was found for the marauders, who nightly grew more daring, soon there would be no domestic animals left; and, since the property of the ranchmen lies wholly in their herds the urgency of the situation may be understood.

Matters were thus when Oliver Wilsey, of the firm of Wilsey Brothers, who are engaged in the cattle business, rode out in the neighborhood of Round Mountain to look after his stock. While he was some distance off, he saw that something unusual had taken place. The animals showed every evidence of great fear, and off to one side, he quickly discovered a couple of creatures that certainly had no business there.

To his indignant amazement, a nearer approach showed them to be two large mountain lions engaged in devouring one of his calves. They raised their heads as he came nearer, and then, as if they preferred the supper before them to making a meal off of him, resumed their feast, doubtless concluding that he was of no further account.

Wilsey had no gun with him, or he would have fired upon them, but, by vigorous shouts, he succeeded in frightening them off in the direction of the river. Reflect how different would have been the result if the beasts had been genuine African lions.

"This thing has gone far enough," was the reflection of the disgusted young man; "something must be done."

Returning to his friends, he related what he had seen. Their views coincided with his own.

"We must rid the woods of the pests," said one, decisively; "for if things go on this way much longer, we shall have no stock left."

"Let's clean them out entirely," added another.

"What's the best way to do it?"

"We'll see Dave, and get him to help."

The speaker alluded to a friend named David Brock, a young man who lived a few miles down the river, and was the owner of several excellent bear dogs. He was fond of hunting with them, and there was no doubt that he would be more than willing to join in the sport, which promised to be of an exciting character.

The party made their way to the cabin of Brock and stated the situation.

"I'm with you," was his enthusiastic response; "that's what I keep my dogs for, and they'll enjoy it as much as we."

Accordingly they made their way to the spot where

the remains of the calf lay, and the canines were ordered to take the trail. With their noses to the ground, they circled about for a few moments, when one of them uttered a sharp cry and was off like a shot, with the others at his heels. They were on the track of the lions, and stirring times were at hand.

But the afternoon was well along, and while the young men were chasing the dogs, darkness closed about them, and the hunt, so far as they were concerned, was over for the day. Brock's experience, however, in hunting California lions made him confident of the result.

In fact, he was so certain that he could best manage the business alone that he was left to do so. His friends returned to their homes, he promising not to come back until he had completed his task.

The next morning was Sunday, but Brock felt that it would not do to defer the business. By the time it was fairly light, he was running after his dogs, and they catching sight of their master, resumed the pursuit with all vigor.

It was not long before they caught sight of a large lioness, who, not liking the appearance of things, made for her hiding-place, which was not far away. The dogs tore after her, but would not have overtaken her, had she not shown fight just before reaching her retreat. There was a meaning to this action on her part which Brock suspected, though it might not have occurred to a hunter of less experience than he.

The lioness waited until her canine foes came up and assailed her, when she cuffed them right and left like so many cubs. They were persistent, however, and darted at her again as fast as they could roll over and leap to their feet.

Meanwhile Brock was not idle. He saw that the one effective method of bringing matters to a focus was to get between the beast and the cave in which she made her home. He lost no time, therefore, in working around beyond her, so as to shut off her retreat.

The lioness kept her weather eye on him and he had hardly reached the point for which he was aiming when the enraged creature turned her back upon the dogs and came for him like a cyclone. This was precisely what the hunter anticipated, and for which he was prepared.

The course of Brock in this crisis was unique, and so far as I know original with himself. He held a trusty rifle in his hand, and yet attempted to make no use of it. Facing the animal, he stood perfectly motionless until she was almost upon him. Then, like a flash, he dodged to one side, and she, unable to check or turn in time, passed a few paces beyond. As she wheeled, he fired, and she fell dead with a bullet through her heart.

Assisted by the dogs, Brock now made an examination of the den near at hand. Among the leaves, sticks and boulders, he came upon three young lions about the size of half-grown cats. They were little spitfires and fought so desperately that they would have given the dogs considerable trouble to overcome them, but Brock, with no little patience and skill, mastered them at last, and carried them to his home as trophies of victory. Although the lions of the vicinity had not been exterminated by any means, one family was pretty effectually broken up.

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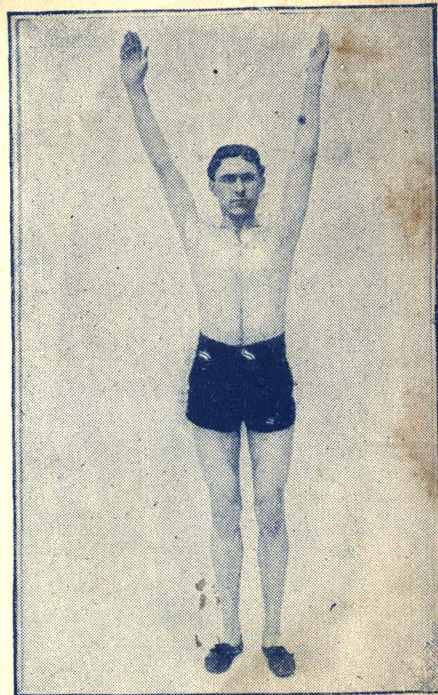
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